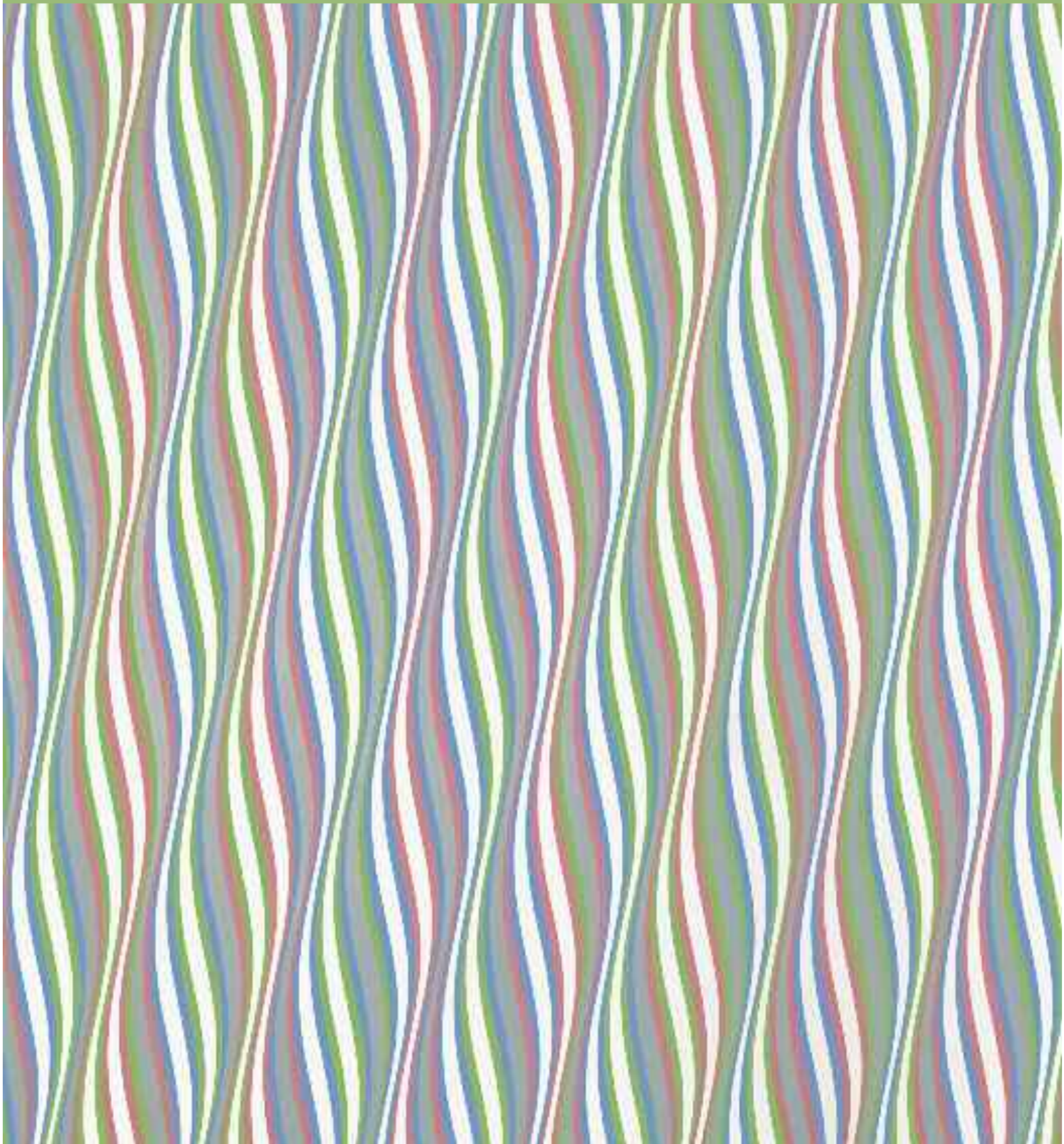


THE KENSINGTON SOCIETY

2016–2017



THE KENSINGTON SOCIETY

23 St James's Gardens, London W11 4RE
www.kensingtonsociety.org
2016–2017

The objects of the society are to preserve and improve the amenities of Kensington for the public benefit by stimulating interest in its history and records, promoting good architecture and planning in its development, and by protecting, preserving and improving its buildings, open spaces and other features of beauty or historic interest.

PATRON

His Royal Highness The Duke of Gloucester, KG, GCVO

PRESIDENT

Nick Ross

VICE-PRESIDENTS

The Rt. Hon. The Earl of Snowdon, GCVO[‡]
General, The Lord Ramsbotham of Kensington, GCB, CBE
Sir Ronald Arculus, KCMG, KCVO[‡]

COUNCIL

Barnabus Brunner
Peter De Vere Hunt
Susan Lockhart
Sir Angus Stirling

TRUSTEES

Amanda Frame, *chairman*
Martin Frame, *treasurer and membership secretary*
Michael Bach, *chairman of the planning committee*
Michael Becket, *annual report editor*
Thomas Blomberg, *editor of newsletter and website, member of planning committee*
Sophia Lambert, *member of the planning committee*
Henry Peterson, *member of the planning committee*
Anthony Walker, *member of the planning committee*
Traci Weaver, *secretary, events chairman, resigned December 2016*
Holly Smith

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Registered charity 267778

[‡] See page 12, 13

Photographs:
page 4 Holly Smith
pages 16, 17, 18, 19 courtesy of Karsten Schubert Gallery
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page 48, 54 Michael Bach
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CONTENTS

President's note	4
Chairman's report	6
Annual general meeting 2016	10
Obituaries: Sir Ronald Arculus, Lord Snowden and David Le Lay	12
Health and air quality: our future By Amanda Frame	14
Features	
Bridget Riley By Michael Becket	16
Local retailer - Fiskins By Michael Becket	20
Local retailer - Jay Patel By Michael Becket	23
Blue plaques - Douglas Bader By Michael Becket	25
Lord-Lieutenant By Michael Becket	29
Royal Geographical Society By Dr Rita Gardner CBE	32
Design Museum By Amanda Frame	36
20th Century Society By Peter Ruback	39
Kensington TA Barracks By Michael Becket	43
Planning reports	46
Reports from affiliated societies	61
Statement of financial activities	75
Membership form	96

President's note

Nick Ross

NO, NO, NO. The default position when anyone wants to build anything is to object. After all, we're rarely consulted meaningfully about development proposals, and were it not for objectors more of our heritage would be lost and more ugly buildings would blight the landscape. In any case the rules for commenting on planning applications demand a binary response, so it's hardly surprising that we, as citizens, and the Kensington Society as our protector, rarely send the Borough's planning officers comments in support.

But maybe we should find time to pause and to reflect, both about our own behaviour and about the planning process itself.

On the one hand, individuals and civic societies can go to great lengths to explore proposals in depth, make constructive criticism, propose improvements and convince the local planners, only to be squashed by a distant body on appeal. The Odeon on Kensington High Street is a case in point, and Duke's Lodge is another sad example, on the corner of Holland Park and Holland Park Avenue: expropriating open space, digging seven storeys down, with loss of housing and no affordable replacements, and where the local authority has been overruled by the Planning Inspectorate. Such appeals are often too costly for the borough to pursue.

On the other hand, we can sometimes be narrow-minded. Everyone wants to see



Nick Ross

the back of Newcombe House, one of the 'ugly sister' concrete tower slabs at Notting Hill Gate. But try putting up something better. Opposition to a replacement has been fierce, with more than 100 objectors, mostly disputing the need to increase the height, and complaining that the flats proposed are so expensive they will appeal to, "no-one but foreign money launderers". But there's the rub. The site is so valuable that any redevelopment will have to get a lot back

for its investors. They can't defy economics any more than builders can disregard gravity. The present scheme proposes high quality materials, an open public plaza, a range of social benefits including a GP surgery, 5,000sqm of offices (the area badly needs to retain employment) and a range of boutique shops. This is why the Kensington Society supported the proposals. The alternatives are either that Newcombe House is allowed to remain a decaying eyesore for years to come, or that a lower, cheaper and inferior project takes its place, colonising the farmer's market and without improvements to the public realm.

I freely confess that I have objected to planning proposals far more often than I have supported them. But when obliged to consider the wider picture, my perspective shifts. I have seen at first-hand how neighbours have deplored what another resident is doing and then gone on to do the same themselves. Whether putting on extensions or digging basements, it is a fair bet that someone in the street who now opposes it will eventually follow suit, or sell advantageously to someone who does. In what psychologists call the false attribution error we regard 'them' as being greedy and selfish, while 'we' are merely trying to make the most of what we have.

Similarly, we all – or almost all of us – want a handy airport that's a gateway to the world, but it took a quarter of a century before Terminal 5 was finally opened, and the battle over Heathrow's third runway has been even fiercer. It is inevitable, and perhaps right, that we will all be NIMBYs to some extent, protecting our patch at the expense of someone else's; but we should not dress up self-interest as nobility. Nor should we embroider our arguments with bogus science, against fracking, or basements for

example, when the real objection – a perfectly valid but different one – is about the noise and dislocation that developments involve.

My own first reaction to the Newcombe House replacement was like that of many others: too big, too out of scale, too undistinguished and too transnational to seem comfortable in Notting Hill. Amanda Frame and other in the society were equally inclined to take up our default position and say no. But the more we looked into it, the more we talked to the developers and understood what they required to make their investment pay, the more we persuaded them to make the spaces more accessible and more useful to local people, the more we came to realise that, though much taller than we would have wanted, this was about as good a scheme as we could get. I'm proud that we didn't say no. And if the inspectorate upholds the developer's appeal, on this occasion I shall not be disappointed.

The Kensington Society and local associations need help. We need people with an interest in the borough, plus knowledge of such subjects as architecture, accounting, conferences, social conditions, or environmental issues. Please participate: make suggestions, recruit people, join in the work of local associations and the society itself.

We and the associations also need help with administration, so please come and help, and recruit more people to join.

Chairman's Report

Amanda Frame

Our focus is on Kensington but we must not lose sight of the wider context

As this is a report for the year I will repeat a few issues mentioned in the newsletter. No report on the activities of 2016 can go without mentioning the changes in our political situation. First came the new Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, the Labour candidate, on 5 May. His priorities were the housing crisis, the appalling air quality and traffic congestion. He promised that 50% of all new homes would be “genuinely affordable”, Londoners would have “first dibs” on new homes and there would be a crackdown on the sale to overseas investors. He also recognised the unsound policy of allowing offices to convert to residential without planning permission. These are all critical policy changes for London, but we await the action.



Amanda Frame

New Prime Minister – new opportunities?

On 23 June 2016 the citizens of the UK voted by a slim majority to exit the European Union. So much has happened since then and so much more is to happen in the coming months, years even decades. We now have a new Prime Minister who may have priorities different from the previous government.

However, we are still affected by many of the changes to the planning system developed under David Cameron, and particularly at the direction of George Osborne, which were geared towards development, almost at any cost. Despite the cry for more houses, which we do not deny are needed, we fought and stopped, at least temporarily, the right to turn offices into housing in RBKC. Meanwhile our pubs were being lost to luxury houses and many of our local shops became estate agents selling to an ever increasing foreign market. Affordable housing became a thing of the past, with only 13% of new homes given planning permission in 2015 classified as affordable. 2016 was even lower. Who will be living in all the new housing on Warwick Road, the former hotel sites in De Vere Gardens, the playing field for Holland Park School or the gardens of the Commonwealth Institute? Who might live in the future development sites of the Odeon and Lancer Square?

The RBKC 2010 Core Strategy promoted housing with three or more bedrooms, which ultimately favoured the large flats which were priced outside the level of even the best-heeled Londoner and were openly targeted at the Asian and Middle Eastern investment market. As a result, Kensington & Chelsea has seen a reduction

in population and even faster loss of registered voters as new housing stock has been soaked up by non-resident, non-voters. Following the proposed boundary changes which have still to be finalised, we are threatened with losing our MP.

Our open spaces have been sacrificed to deeper, taller and larger developments. Developments such as the blocks along Warwick Road were granted permission for less open/green space since they were considered to be within walking distance of Holland Park. Duke's Lodge was approved by an inspector who paid no attention to our new basement policy, the need for more housing and, particularly, for affordable housing, nor the loss of more open space. Our open space jewel, Holland Park, is suffering from the growing intensity of use.

Then there is the crude weapon, so ineptly introduced by George Osborne, of the stamp duty land tax (SDLT). That 12% tax for buying a property at the borough's current average price of £1.34m would be £160,000. As a result occupiers of more valuable properties cannot afford to move even if they want to down-size.

In our newsletter we said a decision is needed to recognise the impacts of the previous government's policies: SDLT, permitted development without any controls, deregulating short-let properties, even such proposals as allowing the planning process to be privatised. Equally challenging are non-governmental problems such as how to control density, the loss of our city green spaces, the need for housing which locals can afford and, of course, foreign property investment in the residential market.

It would appear that with a new ministerial team better attuned to the needs of London and a new, more active mayor who is more determined to tackle the key issues than the last one, there are some hopeful signs for London.

However, we should note the few issues which have been addressed.

We were disappointed, though not surprised, by Theresa May's decision to approve the Heathrow expansion for a third runway. London Forum reported in its winter newsletter: "Nevertheless there has been a chorus of opposition and criticism from a wide range of interested parties, including councils, environmental groups, and even the International Airlines Group, parent of British Airways, Heathrow's biggest customer; it has said that the project's costs would make the airport uneconomic. The proposal probably faces years of legal challenges". Even the committee recommending the runway has had second thoughts about the pollution it will cause.

Several of previous administration's ideas have quietly died a death, including the potentially dangerous idea of privatising the Land Registry, which has been dropped following fierce opposition with 318,000 signatures on a 38-Degree (an online petition organisation) petition and over 20,000 people, including the Kensington Society, commenting on the consultation.

Signs of hope?

The Mayor of London is taking steps to improve the environment. He is currently finalising proposals for tackling London's poor air quality, including phasing out highly-polluting vehicles and in the meantime taxing their use. By 2020 Transport for London's (TfL) revenue grant will have been drastically reduced. We will watch with interest the result of this reduction on TfL's plans for South Kensington

station, and pressures for more on-street advertising.

Later in this report Henry Peterson will comment on the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation plans. One may think that a development on the outskirts of North Kensington would have little effect on us until one realises the plans include 25,000 new homes on the 1,600-acre site. It will be bigger than both the Earl's Court and White City developments put together.

The government has given its approval for the new non-governmental agency to take over the role of managing the parks from the Royal Parks Agency. We, along with the Friends of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, will keep a watchful eye on the ways the parks are financed and managed in the future. We have already expressed our concerns over the state of the Brompton Cemetery, which is managed by the Royal Parks, and have endorsed their heritage lottery funding efforts.

The society

Within the Kensington Society we have had a wonderful year. Our financial status is now secure, which has enabled us to take opportunities, to assist local societies with their challenges. The planning committee led by Michael Bach, with Sophia Lambert, Thomas Blomberg, Anthony Walker, Amanda Frame and Henry Peterson, and often assisted by local society members, continues with the vigilance required.

We have assisted both our members and other societies with planning comments. There is always the basement application which is pushing beyond the CL7 (the rule restricting the depth and requiring the remaining garden to be in one area), policy restrictions. We have seen a growth in what is often presented as a garden "shed" which actually is an extension of the house at the foot of the garden. One would think it is not a problem until there is a large loss of open space with a structure extending above the prevailing garden walls and loss of trees and planting. We have also joined our affiliated societies in opposing the loss of retail units to the ever encroaching restaurant/take-away outlets in South Kensington, Kensington High Street and in and around Portobello. It still amazes us that there are more estate agents eager to take our remaining retail shops. With the slowdown in the luxury market one would think there are enough agents but it is not so.

Events

In November the Design Museum opened in the former Commonwealth Institute iconic tent building on Kensington High Street. We still regret the loss of the gardens, however we now celebrate what is to be an increasing asset to Kensington. The society held the first opening party on 29 November. The attendance was over 200 and, though there were some obvious "teething" problems, the evening was a great success. Sadly it was the last that Traci Weaver as trustee and event chairman will coordinate. We all thank her for her amazing efforts through the years. See an article on the museum on page 36.

Trustees' work

Thomas Blomberg, besides his active role on the planning committee, runs our website. A challenging job as we are not always as up to date with the information he needs. Thomas also produces the newsletter and wrote the informative article on

the growing problems with short lets which has helped in pushing the council for more controls. Michael Bach is chairman of the planning committee. Michael Becket is the editor of the annual report. Martin Frame continues to man, single handed, all the membership records, the accounts, the GiftAid applications and me.

Conclusion:

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea is the smallest borough in London. Of the 18 borough wards, the Kensington Society represents 14 and a half. Three-quarters of the borough is within conservation areas, with over 3,800 buildings listed. The very high property value produces huge development pressures and major challenges for the society.

As stated before, opportunities abound. Local opinion must be reflected in the planning process. Thanks to the support from our affiliated societies and our members we are making progress.

MORE HELP WANTED

We however always need more help. Martin would welcome help in the accounting area. We now need a secretary to take the meeting notes at the trustee meetings and also help with the increased correspondence. Traci will be hard to replace as event chairman, but we do need someone to help with the programme we have already agreed for this year. Planning issues continue and anyone interested in joining Michael Bach's team is very welcome.

We do need to enlarge the membership of the society to give greater weight to our negotiations with the council, developers and others. There is a need for more people to participate in the work of the society. We would like to broaden the range of experience and expertise in the board of trustees through additional members, and also to widen the range of subjects we consider. That might mean setting up sub-committees to look at subjects such as air pollution, crime, transport, schooling, events coordinator and sponsorship such as competitions and awards.

So please try to recruit more people to join and do please come to help. It is not a full-time commitment that is needed, just somebody keeping an eye on the appropriate topic and from time to time reporting to the membership and the trustees.

We try to help you – please try to help us to do that.

The 63rd annual general meeting of The Kensington Society was held on 14 April 2016

AMANDA FRAME, chairman of the trustees welcomed distinguished guests and members: mayor of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, councillor Robert Freeman and Mrs Robert Freeman; the leader of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, Nick Paget-Brown; leader of the Labour Group of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, councillor Robert Atkinson; vice-president of the Kensington Society, General, The Lord Ramsbotham of Kensington, GCB, CBE and Lady Ramsbotham; and council of The Kensington Society, Sir Angus Stirling. Apologies from Victoria Borwick, MP Kensington.

The minutes of the 2015 AGM and financial statements for the year ending 31 December 2015, set out in the annual report, were confirmed and approved nem con.

Michael Bach, Michael Becket, Thomas Blomberg, Amanda Frame, Martin Frame, Sophia Lambert, Henry Peterson, Holly Smith, Anthony Walker and Traci Weaver put their names forward to serve as trustees in 2016/17 and were proposed and approved nem con. Hilary Bell offered her resignation which was accepted. The trustees proposed the election of Martin Frame as treasurer and Traci Weaver as secretary. The proposal was seconded from the floor and approved nem con.

Nick Ross noted that the Kensington Society has grown into a much more effective and formidable power for good in the borough and credited the trustees as well as the members. He stressed that local government needs organisations like the Kensington Society to encourage engagement about local

issues that matter and asked politicians and residents to collaborate rather than work at cross purposes. He saluted the efforts of the society's indefatigable chairman, Amanda Frame, and urged residents to become members and get involved.

Amanda Frame gave a brief chairman's report. The society continues to grow and to address ever-increasing challenges presented by the government, our own council and developers. Our finances continue to grow and our events programme has been very successful. We were disappointed at the appeal decisions allowing both the Odeon and the Duke's Lodge developments to proceed. Something is wrong with the appeal process and others are equally concerned. She was hopeful the new mayor for London will address afresh the problems of tall buildings, increasing pollution and the imbalance in the housing market. Mrs Frame praised the hard work by the trustees and the support of the society's members.

Michael Bach, chair of the planning committee, highlighted a number of important issues that had arisen due to government changes in the planning system including policies that undermine the council's ability to retain premises for our small businesses and build upwards without planning consent. The society took on two major schemes which went to planning inquiries – the Odeon Cinema and Duke's Lodge. As the chairman mentioned, these were unsuccessful. The Newcombe House proposal at Notting Hill Gate is controversial, but the society along with many other residents' groups supported the main thrust of



the scheme now on appeal. RBKC's new basement policy and Construction Code of Practice as well as the Neighbourhood Plan for St Quintin, (thanks to Henry Peterson's strong guidance), and engagement with planning enforcement were cited as positives.

Nick Paget-Brown acknowledged the tensions of balancing varied needs across the borough. Cross Rail in North Kensington will unlock all sorts of housing opportunities and units, and he thanked Peter Hendy and Network Rail for moving this forward as well as the society chairman for mentioning housing. Noting the success of the new policies, he is hopeful that resident engagement particularly with the Kensington Society will keep improving.

Nick Ross introduced honoured guest

Peter Hendy, chair of Network Rail. Mr Hendy recounted how he became chair of Network Rail highlighting time spent at Transport for London delivering London's transport strategy for mayors Livingstone and Johnson. He noted that the key for transport is reliability – people want it to work first and foremost. The UK has the oldest train system in the world. It needs help and it is a privilege to run it as there is a lot to do. A question and answer session followed and Nick Ross thanked Mr Hendy.

The meeting was concluded by mayor Robert Freeman inviting members and guest to the mayor's parlour. Mayor Freeman thanked the Kensington Society for its work and for being such good value and urged people to join.

Obituaries

❧ Sir Ronald Arculus ❧

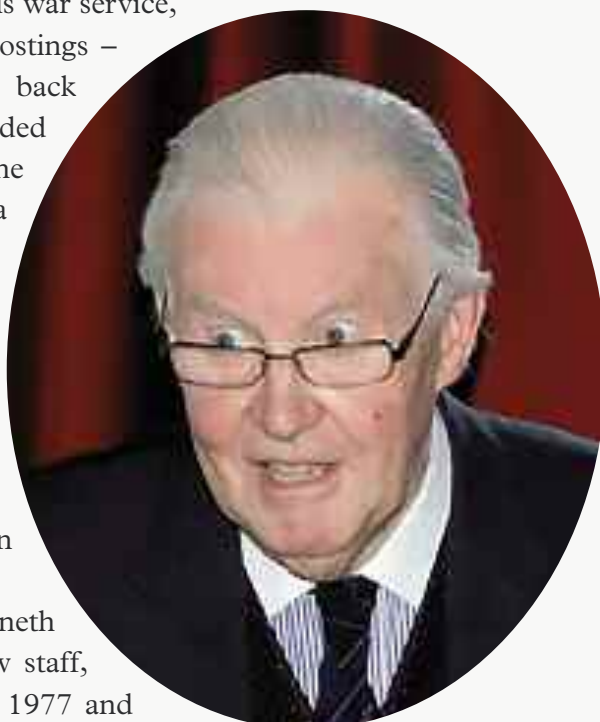
Sir Ronald Arculus, who died aged 93, was ambassador to Italy and later an energetic spokesman for Kensington residents against the damage to their environment.

He joined the Foreign Office in 1947 after his war service, and having had the usual round of overseas postings – San Francisco, La Paz, back home, Ankara, back home, Washington and New York City – he headed the science and technology department of the Foreign Office and the process made him a moderniser. So when he was appointed economic minister in Paris in 1973 he was keen to introduce then novel management techniques. He surprised and antagonised some staff at the Paris embassy by asking whether they used management by objectives, and despite opposition gently insisted they introduced it. Only later did the notion gain acceptance.

He also had a disagreement with Sir Kenneth Berrill, head of Downing Street's policy review staff, who was engaged in a cost-cutting exercise in 1977 and criticised the embassy's "Rolls-Royce" image in the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré and recommended a move to more modest premises. Arculus took umbrage and said that meant "if you represented a tatty country, you should accurately reflect it by being tatty also".

Despite that he was appointed head of the UK delegation to the United Nations conference on the Law of the Sea before getting his knighthood and reaching a long-held ambition of appointment to Rome in 1979. It was a rough time of terrorist threats and dangers including the kidnapping and assassination by the Red Brigades of the former Italian prime minister Aldo Moro. Arculus seemed well able to withstand the pressures, managing to enjoy "dances on summer nights under the cherry trees, a midnight swim in the pool – talking politics, of course", and hosting the Royal Ballet "for an afternoon of tea and swimming", as he told one interviewer.

Among his more difficult guests was the prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, for whom he arranged a late-evening "scenic drive to places of interest", perhaps to calm her temper after dinner with Francesco Cossiga, the prime minister. At least as trying was the organisation, and security, of the Queen's state visit to Rome, Genoa, Naples and Palermo in October 1980, which he characteristically carried through with efficient ease.



When he retired to London in 1983, he was scarcely idle. Sir Ronald was a non-executive director of Glaxo for four years and remained a consultant until 1995. He was a consultant to London & Continental Bankers and Trusthouse Forte and was appointed a special adviser on the trains planned to run via the Channel Tunnel then being constructed with a brief to ensure a fair portion of the work for British companies. He was also a governor of the British Institute of Florence, director of appeals for the King's Medical Research Trust, and a patron of Venice in Peril.

With all that, he still found time, through his leadership of the residents' association of his mansion block, Kensington Court Gardens, to join the council of the Kensington Society in 1991. He hated it as he said there was nothing to do. But he stayed on the council and joined the executive committee as well in 1998. The following year he became chairman, and in 2001 Sir Ronald became president, resigning only in 2012 at the age of 89. He campaigned against the arrival of embassies of newly independent east European states in the borough's residential streets, and objected vigorously to the Daniel Liebeskind-designed "spiral" addition to the Victoria & Albert Museum in South Kensington, on the grounds that the site was "no place for a revolutionary architectural experiment ... Kensington is not Bilbao".

In 1998 he was also brave enough to speak out against plans for a memorial to Diana, Princess of Wales, in Kensington Gardens, on the grounds that it would attract "hordes of tourists". The days after her death "when thousands of people were milling about" had been "very trying" for residents, he said: "We cannot face that day after day, year after year."

His beloved wife, Sheila née Fox, who he married in 1923, died in 2015. He is survived by their son and daughter.

Sir Ronald Arculus, born 11 February 1923, died 28 August 2016.

Lord Snowdon

Antony Charles Robert Armstrong-Jones, 1st Earl of Snowdon, GCVO, RDI, 1930–2017

Lord Snowdon, who died at the start of this year, was a busy fashion and portrait photographer, a documentary photographer for the Sunday Times, an industrial designer and campaigner for the disabled. But he also managed to fit in being vice-president of the Kensington Society for 22 years.

David Le Lay

David Le Lay, chairman of the council of the Chelsea Society for over twenty years, died on 17 January 2017. He encountered many difficult issues and decisions during his tenure which he faced with courage, careful thought and great charm. He was innovative and progressive in his thinking but always in the context of ensuring that the character and traditions of Chelsea were preserved.

Health and air quality: our future

Amanda Frame

In September RBKC issued a consultation, Kensington & Chelsea Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-2021. There were a number of challenges outlined in the consultation which the report labelled as “acute in this borough”:

- quarter of borough children (under 16s) live in poverty;
- RBKC has the second highest proportion of deaths attributable to air pollution in London;
- RBKC has the highest proportion of population with severe and enduring mental illness known to GPs in the country (2013);
- An ageing population with growing health and care demand implications.

As well as these demand pressures, we have inherited a health and care system that is fundamentally reactive and not fit to cope with the rising demand.

The Kensington Society commented on the Wellness and Health consultation. Most importantly we failed to find a single specific measure being proposed to reduce air pollution despite RBKC being identified as the second worst borough in the UK for the proportion of deaths attributable to air pollution (the latest Public Health England data rank RBKC third behind the City of London and the City of Westminster).

The interim report states that “several responses concerned the environment and air pollution specifically. Respondents were keen for the Board to recognise the links between the environment and health in the Strategy, both in terms of the natural and urban environment. Several respondents highlighted the high proportion of deaths attributable to air pollution in the Royal Borough and the disproportionate health impact of air pollution on young and vulnerable populations. Areas where respondents were keen for the Board to act included idling

vehicles, restricting construction traffic and initiatives to encourage the use of electric cars, including increasing the number of charging points in the borough”.

That is it. No action recommended.

We did applaud the recommendation within the report that fast food restaurants are an issue with obesity and the report supported a strategic aim to tackle unhealthy lifestyles and obesity by restricting fast-food take-aways. However, we now understand that the planning department has opposed this suggestion as there is no control in the current planning policy. Why can't we change the policy to reflect the need? We are challenging this position in the Local Plan review.

Since October one organisation after another has reported on the damaging effect of our air quality and the pollutants. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance initiated a consultation at the end of last year and a deadline for responses on 25 January 2017 on Air pollution: outdoor air quality and health. The report states that “*being exposed to short-term and long-term air pollution caused by human activities can have a significant health impact, with harmful emissions and the environmental risks associated with pollution linked to around 25,000 deaths a year in England. Road traffic causes more than 64% of the air pollution in urban areas. Air pollution and its health impact also costs the UK up to £18.6 billion a year*”.

Accelerating or decelerating too rapidly leads to inefficient driving and fuel consumption with harmful emissions into the environment unnecessarily. NICE is calling on businesses and transport services to educate their transport staff in more efficient ‘smooth’ driving skills, and turning their engine off at a standstill. NICE’s recommendation may seem

impractical but if you have ever been passed at great speed by a heavy lorry then you know that speed and fumes are issues.

The Mayor of London has also issued a new proposal to improve air quality. The proposal is to introduce a new Emissions Surcharge (within the Congestion Charge Zone) and options for expanding the Ultra-Low Emissions Zone to the North/South Circular or London-wide. The council has supported this recommendation.

People who live near a major road are up to 12% more likely to develop dementia, a group of memory-loss disorders including Alzheimer's disease, than those who live further away, according to a study published on 4 January 2017 in the medical journal *The Lancet*.

RBKC opened the Kensington Primary Academy on the corner of Warwick Avenue and Kensington High Street. The new North Kensington Academy is 140 metres from the elevated A40. These sites were selected long before the studies in the damaging health effects of the air pollution in our borough.

We have endorsed the idling engine campaign promoted by the council. It should help a bit but it is obvious that RBKC needs a detailed plan to address the cause of the problem – traffic. Warning people about the dangers of air pollution and giving people advice on protecting themselves and reducing pollution for themselves will help but it is not the solution. Can they move their asthmatic child to a different school away from traffic or sell their home and move to the country?

We have asked the chairman of planning and the planning department to develop policies which will reduce construction traffic. A recent TfL report notes that lorries carrying materials to and from building sites are disproportionately responsible for cyclist deaths. A recent basement application was approved which requires lorries to attend the site on average seven times a day for 40 weeks for the soil removal and an additional 60 more days for two lorries to complete the construction. These lorries are all diesel, leave their engines idling while waiting and so greatly increase the pollution of our air. That is one project. Consider the quantity of HGVs that enter the borough daily. This pollution is not avoidable unless controls are put in place, it will become worse.

It is not just the HGVs entering the borough, in addition, there is no environmental consideration as to the soil disposal. Where does it go? Is it re-cycled in an environmentally proper manner? How many miles must the soil removed from a basement excavation travel to reach the disposal site? Is it an environmentally acceptable site or merely dumped in a field? All this can and should be reviewed and restrictions set.

There should be no constraints on improving the policies on air quality. Action points which should be within the revised Local Plan:

- Set a limit for the number of lorries accessing a construction site daily and over the entire time of the project;
- Prohibit idling at construction sites;
- Develop an air strategy plan for the entire borough, not just for a major site;
- Define areas for poor air quality and set planning restrictions such as locating bedrooms away from major travel routes;
- Require open spaces which are car free. No longer accept balconies and roads within developments in the open area calculations;
- Resist locating schools, nurseries and care homes, or other vulnerable people, near sites which have high pollution levels;
- Require charging points within the public realm and in any new development;
- Encourage green roofs with dedicated access;
- Encourage tree planting;
- Encourage low- and zero-emission vehicles for retail deliveries;
- Define restricted idling areas particularly in high emission areas near schools, hospitals and care homes.



Kensington Primary Academy, junction of A320 and A315, Warwick Ave and Kensington High Street

Feature

By
Michael Becket

Bridget Riley

OP-ART IS HARD TO MISS. It is the style of painting which startles the eyes with vivid patterns and volatile designs writhing across the canvas. The chances are if you encounter one of these, it will be by Bridget Riley.

Bridget Louise Riley CH CBE was born at Norwood, London in 1931, the daughter of a printer. He moved the family home and his business to Lincolnshire. When war broke out her father was drafted into the army and Lincolnshire was deemed less safe from German bombers than the west of England. Bridget, along with her sister, mother and aunt, was evacuated to a cottage near Padstow in Cornwall.

After attending Cheltenham Ladies College, she studied at Goldsmiths' School of Art from 1949 to 1952, and at the Royal College of Art from 1952 to 1955. Her fellow students there included Peter Blake, Geoffrey Harcourt and Frank Auerbach. She found the Royal College confusing and difficult and the teaching and direction unrewarding. She wanted to go her own way as she found the institutional framework inhibiting.

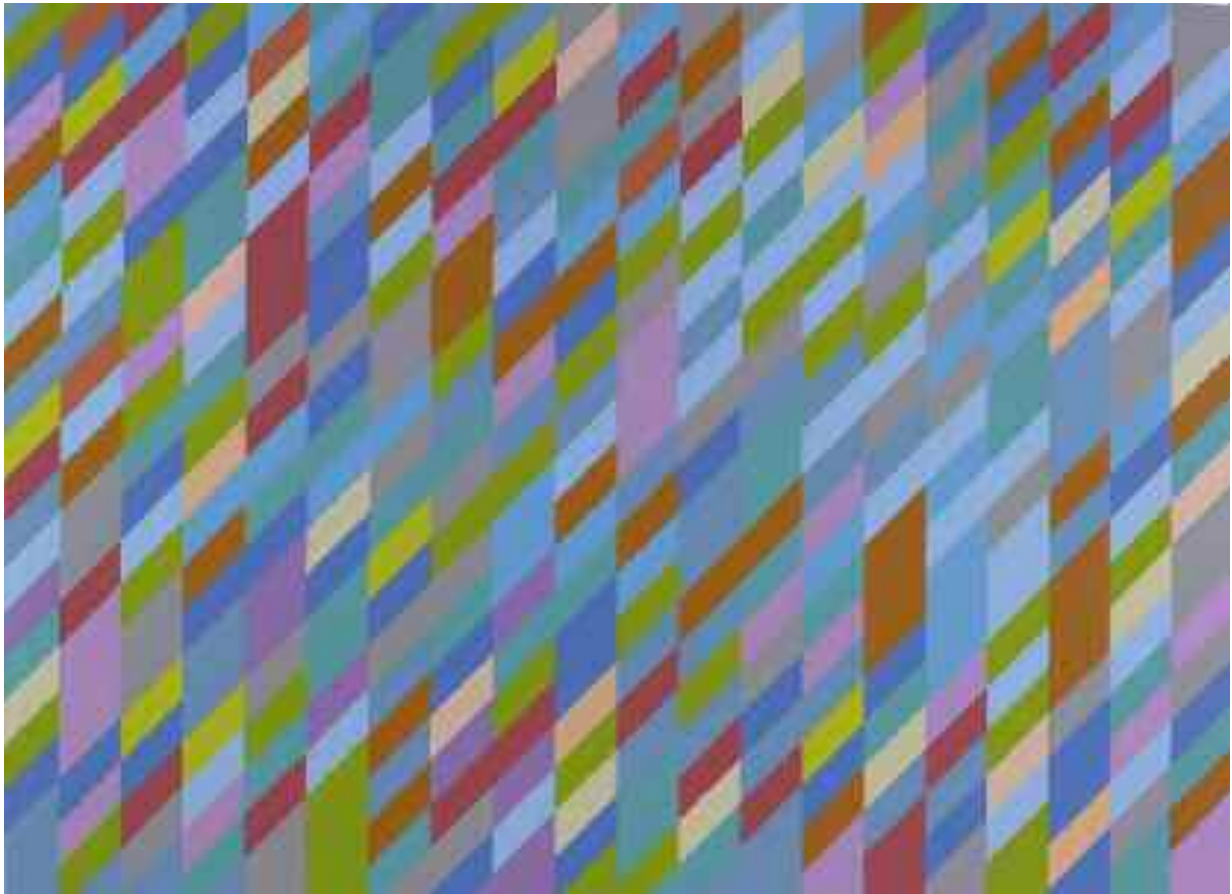
There was another reason for leaving the Royal College. Bridget Riley's father had been seriously injured in a car accident so she returned to Lincolnshire for a couple of years to look after him. The combination of stresses led to a physical and mental breakdown. She eventually returned to London but found it hard to return to painting. She found a job selling glass at an antique shop in Marylebone Lane.

From 1957 to 1958 she taught at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, Harrow (now known as Sacred Heart Language College). In 1959 Bridget Riley joined the Loughborough School of Art, where she initiated a basic design course. Still trying to find a satisfactory niche, she became a part-time illustrator for the J Walter Thompson advertising agency. Following a long trip to Italy – seemingly an indispensable experience for artists – she became a part-time teacher at Hornsey School of Art and at Croydon School of Art from 1962 to 1964.

“It was only after I had been out of the art school that I actually copied a small Seurat, ... to follow his thought, because if you do copy an artist, and you have a close feeling for him, that you need to know more about his work, there is no better way than actually to copy, because you get very close indeed to how somebody



Working on paper cartoons,
Bridget Riley in front of Justinian



Between 1989

thinks.” As a result, “I learned from Seurat this important thing about colour and light, that ‘a light’ can be built from colour. I learned a great deal about interaction, that ‘a blue’ in different parts (the same blue) will play all sorts of different roles”.

This early work was figurative with a semi-impressionist style which shifted to pointillism, mainly producing landscapes. “For me nature is not landscape, but the dynamism of visual forces.”

From there she evolved her own approach, soon to be known as op-art, using geometric patterns which can evoke a sensation of movement and can produce a disorienting effect almost to the point of seasickness.

She and Peter Sedgley bought a derelict farmhouse on the Vaucluse plateau in the south of France and converted it into a studio. Back in London. She had already aroused interest in her work while teaching at Croydon and in 1962 her first solo exhibition of mainly black and white works, organised by Victor Musgrave of Studio One. A second solo show followed next year at Nottingham University. Then came the big one. She was chosen to exhibit alongside Victor Vasarely, the world-renowned pioneer of op-art, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, with one of her works on the catalogue cover. The exhibition, called *The Responsive Eye*, was greeted with snuffy disdain by the critics but was a huge hit with the public. The op-art label not only entered the language but became fashionable – it suited perfectly the swinging sixties fashions and radical design. Advertising executives swiftly latched on to the powerful graphic style which socked you between the eyes and Bridget Riley soon became a celebrity.

It was about this time she cautiously began to use colour, at first limited to three colours for



Red With Red Triptych 2010

each painting, gradually expanding it to five. “As the artist picks his way along, rejecting and accepting as he goes, certain patterns of enquiry emerge”. Colour finally grabbed her, so from the early 1980s Bridget Riley used colour to create shimmering effects or tessellating patterns. “The music of colour, that’s what I want”, she said. The Ballet Rambert then did something rather surprising – it commissioned Bridget Riley to design sets even before the music had been composed and decided to produce choreography to complement those sets. The ballet was first performed at the Edinburgh Festival in 1983 and was successfully toured, spreading her reputation still wider.

It would take pages to enumerate all her exhibitions and prizes over more than fifty years. In addition there have been honorary doctorates from Oxford and Cambridge and in 1998 she became one of only 65 Companions of Honour in Britain. As a board member of the National Gallery in the 1980s, she blocked Margaret Thatcher’s plan to give an adjoining piece of property over to developers and thus helped ensure the eventual construction of the museum’s Sainsbury Wing. Bridget Riley has been involved as curator in exhibitions by Nicolas Poussin, Bruce Nauman, Piet Mondrian, Paul Klee and in 2010, her choice of pictures at the National Gallery in London, which included Titian, Veronese, El Greco, Rubens, Poussin, and Paul Cézanne.

None of this has stopped her own work. “I work with nature, although in completely new terms. For me nature is not landscape, but the dynamism of visual forces ... an event rather than an appearance. These forces can only be tackled by treating colour and form as ultimate identities, freeing them from all descriptive or functional roles.” Her individual pictures derive from a personal approach: “I work on two levels. I occupy my conscious mind with things to do, lines to draw, movements to organize, rhythms to invent. In fact, I keep myself occupied. But

that allows other things to happen which I'm not controlling ... the more I exercise my conscious mind, the more open the other things may find that they can come through."

She has also created murals for major art institutions, including the Tate, the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and the National Gallery, but none was permanent. In 2014, the Imperial College Healthcare Charity Art Collection commissioned a permanent 56-metre mural, for St Mary's Hospital, in Paddington. It is on the tenth floor of the Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Wing, joining two others for the eighth and ninth floors she painted more than 20 years earlier.

These days she produces large paintings which can take six to nine months to develop. The idea is born as a small colour study in gouache, and if she decides it works, becomes a full-sized gouache, still on paper. Since 1961 the final painting has been executed by assistants following her designs because they are so large. But, as those pictures demand great precision, it is all done under rigid supervision, with the paper design ruled up and all the paints mixed by Bridget Riley to ensure precise hue and intensity. Everything is painted by hand – no rulers, masking tape or mechanical means are allowed.

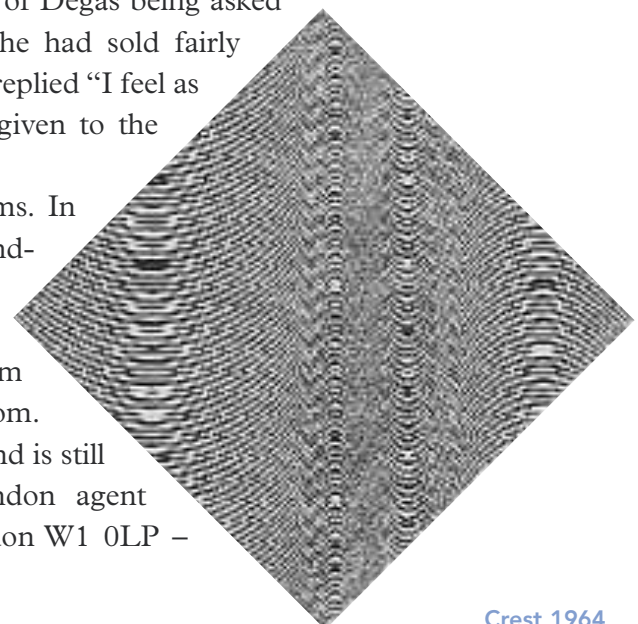
Her popularity and reputation can be gauged from the fact that in 2006, her *Untitled (Diagonal Curve)*, a black-and-white canvas of dizzying curves, was bought by Jeffrey Deitch for \$2.1 million, nearly three times its \$730,000 estimate. Two years later, her dotted canvas *Static 2* brought £1,476,500 (\$2.9 million), far exceeding its £900,000 estimate. In the same year *Chant 2*, part of the trio shown in the Venice Biennale, went to a private American collector for £2,561,250. Such transactions remind one of Degas being asked how he felt after one of his pictures which he had sold fairly cheaply was bought for \$100,000, to which he replied "I feel as a horse must feel when the beautiful cup is given to the jockey".

Such popularity generates its own problems. In 2013, Riley claimed that a wall-sized, black-and-white checkerboard work by Tobias Rehberger plagiarized her painting *Movement of Squares* and asked for it to be removed from display at the Berlin State Library's reading room.

At 84 she now lives quietly in Kensington and is still working and showing regularly at her London agent Karsten Schubert, 46 Lexington Street, London W1 0LP – she has been with him since 1990.



Entice 1974



Crest 1964

Feature

By
Michael Becket

Local retailer - Fiskens

QUEENS GATE PLACE MEWS used to be humming with motor businesses and was the world centre for vintage and specialist cars. Now only one of those businesses remains, Fiskens. Gregor Fiskens explains the trade started when the first petrol pump was installed in Queens Gate Mews, and its owner later expanded into selling cars. Well, actually, nothing so common – the sign actually said “Purveyors of horseless carriage to the nobility and gentry since 1927”.

Around that business the business grew and expanded around the corner. In the 1950s and 60s every garage in Queens Gate Place Mews housed a firm of car craftsmen. One could bring a car in one end, the various companies could restore it mechanically, replace the trim, sort the electrics, and paint it and it could emerge at the far end practically new. The mews was also the centre of vintage cars – “most of the greatest cars in the world have been through this mews”. Then in the 1960s the dinky mews houses started being converted into residential property and the craftsmen were squeezed out.

Mr Fiskens started his career in the business as an assistant to the magnificently named Bunty Scott-Moncrieff, then the acknowledged top expert in such cars. He went on to work with Coys, a London dealer

in specialist cars, and then heard one of the mews properties fell vacant when the dealer retired. He seized the opportunity and “started at the age of 26 with a lifetime’s experience”. This year he celebrates 25 years in the business.

Fiskens deals in vintage cars, racing cars, rally cars, sports cars and rare specialist cars. For instance, its garage contained Nigel Mansell’s Lotus 91/7 badged John Player Special of 1982. It is one of the cheaper cars, setting you back a mere £500,000, and because the engine has frequently to be replaced in such racing cars, a refitted engine will add another £80,000.

But that is peanuts. In the garage at the same time was a startlingly yellow Ferrari 512M which had been owned by four Catalans who raced it all over the world in sports car rallies. Then it was sold, registered in Milan and entered in the Tour de France – no, it did not race against cyclists, that was a sports car set of races now called Tour Automobile. It came second. Derek Hell then set a British land speed record of 192 mph with it in 1976 at RAF Fairford. That lovely but very uncomfortable-looking car – importantly not altered since new – will cost you €13 million, but that does include the engine.

In April 2016, while rearranging the cars in the tight little garage – room for eight at a



Cars get shifted around

squeeze – the Ferrari was temporarily wheeled out into the mews, where a parking attendant promptly slapped a ticket on it. They explained to him it had an Italian number plate, and a set of overseas owners so it would be impossible for Kensington council to trace, but he was undeterred. So Fiskens staff took a snap of car plus ticket which they put on Facebook and Twitter. Within hours it was all over the Internet and several newspapers picked up the nonsense.

The Daily Mail used the pictures with the caption “Traffic wardens issued the £120

ticket on the £10 million ultra-rare 1970 Ferrari 512M after it momentarily parked up on a quiet mews in Kensington, west London”. Fiskens paid the ticket.

But the price of that flashy car is dwarfed by the record so far of \$35 million for a racing Ferrari, sold to someone in Britain – Mr Fiskens discreetly refuses to name the buyer. Reason for the price: “It has rarity and history and it won a famous race”.

He also acts as adviser and buyer when people decide to embark on racing, collecting or have a fancy for driving something rather



Gregor Fisker

special. “We now regularly hear from buyers something along the lines of: ‘I’d love to compete in the Mille Miglia; help me find the right car’”.

About 30% of buyers for these specialised beasts are in the UK, 35% are American, and most of the rest come from Europe. Oriental plutocrats have not yet cottoned on to this trade. A few Japanese have shown interest but the Chinese are not in the market at all, because second-hand goods for them are bad luck. The ticketed yellow Ferrari with five previous owners would therefore be of no possible interest. That attitude also explains why their purchase of London properties is of new build luxury.

Though Mr Fisker occasionally buys cars for his own stock, his business mostly acts as broker selling for clients, and about half the cars never come to Britain at all. That is just as well as storage space is at a premium. In addition to the eight at its present venue, Fiskers has cars dotted in garages through many other mews in the area, with room for 25 altogether. But Mr Fisker is currently restructuring premises two doors down from

the present home, with a lift so cars can be stored in the basement as well.

He claims the top grade of classic cars has been an extremely good investment – “better than gold, silver, stocks, shares, gilts or fine wines”. But despite that impressive-sounding claim, both in person and on his website he emphasises “the primary return should be pleasure” from using the cars. Not easy in the case of the racers which need careful external heating of the engine long before even being turned on, and probably extensive work on them after a run, and they have the added problem the car is generally not licensed for road use. All the same, “The trend today is for even the most famous collections in the world to make regular working use of their cars. Indeed, regular exercise is essential to their all-round health, just as in a racehorse.”

People who buy racing or rally cars generally want to take part anyway. Mr Fisker follows his own advice. In parallel with running the business he has been a racing driver and has completed the Le Mans race four times.

Feature

By
Michael Becket

Local retailer - Jay Patel

JAY PATEL IS AN instinctive entrepreneur. He created a series of successful businesses before a passion led him to start the Japanese Knife Company with its branch in Kensington Church Walk.

He had inherited from his father a number of pharmacies which he ran briefly and then sold to Boots. At one stage he had an art gallery which he also sold. After university he started a business to make traditional, old-fashioned, very English clothes for children, which reached a scale of 27 shops and two factories plus exports all over the world before Terence Conran bought it. Jay Patel liked the business but sold because “he offered more money than it was worth”. It may be your baby, he explains, and you work 14 hours a day to make it work, but after all it is just a business and exists to put food on the table.

A restrictive clause in the sale meant he could not compete, and finally his wife got fed up having him at home under her feet all day long and goaded him into doing something. He had always enjoyed cooking so he decided on a ‘stage’ – the French word for getting apprentices in the kitchens of starred restaurants to work for nothing, both to learn and to pump up the pupils’ CVs. He apprenticed himself to Michel Bras, a triple-starred chef in France whom he knew through selling clothes for his son.

From there to Florence, Spain and north

Africa on similar bases for two years, but he found Hong Kong lacked such a system. Fortunately he met an old school chum who suggested Jay Patel join him in Tokyo. There he managed to continue his apprenticeship and in time met the manager of a major hotel who could not find suitable chefs for his European-style restaurant. Anybody else would have sympathised. Jay, as all his employees call him, returned to London and set up an employment agency for chefs to the far east.

He had been given a departing present by his tutor chef in Tokyo, one of those handmade much-laminated knives which can now sell for thousands of pounds. “It completely changed everything I felt about blades.” Eventually it needed sharpening which is a highly skilled operation with such implements. Apparently there was a man in Leeds to whom chefs went, but an Italian chap in Barnet said his decades of sharpening gave him the experience. He completely wrecked the knife’s elaborate set up. If nobody can sharpen good knives, there must be a business in this.

Over nine years of apprenticeships to some of the most eminent Japanese smiths making handcrafted damascene blades taught Jay why they cost so much. It is not just that the inner core is a high-carbon powdered steel with molybdenum, tungsten and chromium but is

sintered to reduce its constituent particles, and then laminated with a series of differently-constituted carbon and softer steels in such a way that the core protrudes, can be sharpened and the other layers provide the flexibility and protection. There is currently one in the Kensington shop which has a handle and cover which themselves are the result of thirty handmade processes and it retails for £1,659.

Here was another business opportunity for Jay, but there was a problem. Germany was generally known as the maker of the best kitchen knives, so selling exotic Japanese products at four times the price would be tricky. Fortunately at about this time, Kyocera of Japan produced a ceramic knife which had the appealing characteristic of colourful novelty and hence extensive press publicity. Jay immediately got the European distribution rights – which he later sold back to Kyocera when the Japanese wanted to organise their own distribution.

But by that time he had already set up a shed in four bays of a Camden car park as his office and warehouse, was selling by mail order and supplying 600 outlets with a range of Japanese knives. He now has a shop in Baker Street, another in Soho (“there are about 2,000 chefs in the area”), and in

Kensington Church Walk. Plus Paris in the Bastille area and St Germain, and in Stockholm. The plan for Milan and later other European outlets has been suspended until the consequences of Brexit become clearer. Sterling plummeting after the vote wiped 15% off his profits overnight.

In the meantime Kensington has 30% domestic customers who tend to opt for the more stylish and elaborately forged models with exotic handles (predictably expensive) and pay for classes in cookery with most of the starred chefs in the country, as well lessons in how to sharpen properly. Jay is also happy to demonstrate how a really sharp knife and dextrous technique can chop an onion very fine without crushing the cells and hence with nary a tear produced.

The current range starts as low as £10 with the larger handmade laminates running to several hundred pounds. And this time, Jay seems to have invested so much of his time, talent and passion that he cannot imagine selling the business. Perhaps when he retires he may pass it to the employees.

Japanese knife shop

Jay Patel

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Baker Street

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Feature

By
Michael Becket

Blue Plaques

Sir Douglas Steuart Bader CBE DSO DFC FRAeS DL 1910–1982
1955–1982 5 Petersham Mews, Kensington, SW7 5NR

LARGER THAN LIFE CHARACTERS, especially if they are also war heroes, are probably better admired from a distance – in both space and time. Douglas Bader was both and his reputation has a correspondingly controversial aspect.

As early as aged 13 he was introduced to an Avro 504 plane during a school holiday trip to visit his aunt, Hazel, who was marrying the adjutant at RAF Cranwell. The boy was so taken that he became a cadet at Cranwell, but right from the start he was in trouble. He was in fact so disobedient and difficult he was almost expelled but managed to survive to his eighteenth year when he joined the RAF as an officer cadet with a commission two years later.

Bader on his Hurricane



He had not changed however so even in training he showed off with illegal and dangerous stunts. Strict orders forbade unauthorised aerobatics below 2,000 feet, which Bader considered exaggerated concern though seven pilots had died ignoring them. Just one year into his commission, while visiting Reading Aero Club, he tried low-flying aerobatics, apparently on a dare, and crashed when the tip of the left wing touched the ground. Bader was rushed to the Royal Berkshire Hospital, where both his legs were amputated – one above and one below the knee. Bader laconically noted in his logbook after the crash “Crashed slow-rolling near ground. Bad show”.

He was so stubborn and determined that he mastered his artificial legs well enough to be able to drive a modified car, play golf, and even dance. In 1932, Air Under-Secretary Philip Sassoon arranged for him to take up a plane, which he piloted competently. A subsequent medical examination proved him fit for active service, but in the following year the RAF decided this situation was not covered by King’s Regulations. He was invalided out and took an office job with the Asiatic Petroleum Company (now Shell) and, in 1933, married Thelma Edwards whom he had met in convalescence when she was a waitress at the Pantiles tea room in Bagshot.

Bader kept pestering the Air Ministry for a posting and Air Vice-Marshal Halahan, commandant of RAF Cranwell in Bader’s days there, endorsed him and asked the Central Flying School, to assess his capabilities. Training and hard work paid off as, shortly after the outbreak of war, he regained a medical categorisation for operational flying. Just eight years after his accident, and during further flight training he showed he had learnt nothing from his experience – he flew upside down at 600 feet inside the circuit area. Such flamboyant characters seem to get away with almost any misdeed and despite disobedience, foolhardy tendencies and general awkwardness, he was cleared to fly Spitfires and Hurricanes.

At this point his handicap became an advantage. Pilots performing sharp combat turns often blacked out as blood drained from the brain to other parts of the body, usually the legs. As Bader had no legs he remained conscious longer – a distinct advantage over able-bodied pilots.

He was in action over Dunkirk during the Battle of France in 1940, and then the Battle of Britain. The War Office spotted an obvious candidate for boosting morale: the most famous Battle of Britain fighter pilot, getting the headlines as quiet hero fighting the double challenge of the Luftwaffe and his missing legs. Bader’s strong personality and perseverance, especially in cutting through red tape made him popular, but his temper and insensitive hardness mitigated that for people who dealt with him.

Bader believed for years that colliding in mid-air with a Messerschmidt caused his having to bail out over France, but both that and the possibility he was shot down by a German pilot have been doubted by research. It is possible he may have been victim of ‘friendly fire’ as suggested in a television documentary of 2006.

A French maid at the hospital in France where he was recovering tried to get in touch with British agents to enable Bader to escape and brought an offer from a couple to shelter him outside St Omer until he could be passed further down the line. Bader escaped by the classic ploy of tying together a number of sheets, including one he slid from under a comatose New Zealander who had had his arm amputated the day before. He managed the long walk to the safe house despite wearing a British uniform, but another woman at the hospital betrayed the plan. Bader denied that the couple had known he was hiding in their garden. They and the hospital maid were sent to labour camp in Germany. The couple survived. After the war, French authorities sentenced the woman informer to 20 years in prison.

German forces treated Bader with great respect. When he bailed out, Bader's right prosthetic leg became trapped, and he escaped only when the leg's retaining straps snapped. General Adolf Galland, a German flying ace, notified the British and offered them safe passage to drop off a replacement. Hermann Göring himself gave the green light for the operation. An RAF bomber was allowed to drop a new prosthetic leg by parachute to St Omer. The Germans were less impressed when, task done, the bombers proceeded on to their bombing mission to Gosnay Power Station near Bethune, although bad weather prevented the target being attacked.

In August 1942 he escaped again just when a Luftwaffe officer in the area was keen to meet Bader and went to the camp where he was kept. A few days later, Bader was recaptured. During the escape attempt the Germans produced a poster of Bader describing his disability, by saying he "walks well with stick". In fact he had never used a stick and had tried to escape so often the Germans threatened to take away his legs. Finally he was put in the 'escape-proof' Colditz until 1945 when it was liberated by the United States army.



Sir Douglas Bader's London home at 5 Petersham Mews

After his return to Britain, Bader led a victory flypast of 300 aircraft over London in June 1945. He became the Fighter Leader's School commanding officer but could not get on with the newer generation who thought him out of date. In 1946, he retired from the RAF with the rank of Group Captain. Of the variety of job offers he chose Shell despite its not offering the highest pay, partly because the company had been ready to take him on, aged 23, after his accident, and partly because Shell would allow him to continue flying, as an executive. And indeed he spent most of his time abroad flying around and was appointed managing director of Shell Aircraft until he retired in 1969 and became a popular after-dinner speaker on aviation matters.

For all the publicity, Bader was not quite the cosy, stiff-upper-lip, understated war hero the public image portrayed, including in a 1954 biography by Paul Brickhill, called *Reach for the Sky*. It became a best seller and Brickhill did well out of the book, which irritated Bader, who had received a one-off payment of £10,000 (worth around £250,000 today). The Inland Revenue waived any tax on Bader's earnings, which eased the irritation. A film with the same title was released in 1956, starring Kenneth More giving the performance of his life. People came to associate Bader with the quiet and amiable personality of Kenneth More, especially as the film omitted, as Bader noticed, his prolific use of bad language and his abrasive character, merely hinted at in the book. Bader once said, the public still thought he was "the dashing chap Kenneth More".

Not the ones who came into contact with him – he was far from popular at Shell where he was considered arrogant, snobbish and self-centred. Bader also expressed trenchant views on such subjects as juvenile delinquency, apartheid and Rhodesia's defiance of the Commonwealth – he was a strong supporter of Ian Smith's white minority regime. Some African Commonwealth countries had been critical of British military intervention at Suez, to which Bader retorted they could "bloody well climb back up their trees". Later, he wrote the foreword to Hans-Ulrich Rudel's biography *Stuka Pilot*, and said Rudel having been a fervent supporter of the Nazi Party made no difference to him.

During a television interview in the 1960s he said he would like to be prime minister and his policies would include withdrawing sanctions from Rhodesia, stopping immigration into Britain immediately until the "situation had been examined", reintroduction of the death penalty for murder, and banning betting shops, because "they breed protection rackets. That's why we're getting like Chicago in the '20s". During a visit to Munich as a guest of Adolf Galland, he walked into a room full of ex-Luftwaffe pilots and said, "My God, I had no idea we left so many of you bastards alive". He also advocated that people supporting the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament were a "rabble" who should be deported.

However he also campaigned for the disabled and in the Queen's Birthday Honours 1976 was given a knighthood for that work. And, to be fair, he was not the invention of propaganda machines – he really was a successful fighter pilot and war hero.

His workload was exhausting for a legless man with a worsening heart condition. On 5 September 1982, after a dinner honouring the highly controversial Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Arthur 'Bomber' Harris at the Guildhall, at which he spoke, Bader died of a heart attack while being driven home.

One of Bader's artificial legs is kept by the RAF Museum in Stafford, but it is not on public display. Another was sold at auction in February 2008, along with several other items belonging to the RAF ace.

Feature

By
Michael Becket

Lord-Lieutenant

KEN OLISA has had the sort of career Victorian self-help writers like Samuel Smiles idolised, rags to riches, the outsider becoming one of the great and the good. Except that in his case he has managed to keep his feet on the ground, even after becoming Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London. Few people know Greater London has a lord-lieutenant, even the ones who have heard of the title do not know who fills it nor what he does. Which says something about the less flamboyant but practical working functions in the British voluntary ceremonial system. And ignorance of all that is a pity since the job is significant and the man filling the post is not someone most people would expect.

Henry VIII had some local armies raised to resist invasion and as they were headed by local nobles deputising for the king, they were called lord-lieutenants. They got the power "for the suppressing of any commotion, rebellions or unlawful assemblies". The right to recruit soldiers did not vanish until 1921, but a residue of contact with reserves and cadets remain. Lord-lieutenants are still appointed by the monarch, at the recommendation of the prime minister, and most used to be retired generals and the like. That is despite the work now extending to youth work, volunteer schemes, charities and business.

In 1889 London was made a county and got its own lord-lieutenant as a result. Ken

Olisa OBE, the current incumbent, had 13 predecessors and he could not be more different from them: there were three dukes, a marquess, two earls, a viscount, four with baronies and two knights, and eight of them came from the armed services.

Mr Olisa, by contrast, comes from computing and banking background and is the



Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London,
Mr Kenneth Olisa OBE

first black Briton in the post. It makes him Her Majesty's representative in Greater London and has the duty of upholding the dignity of the Crown. He is the person welcoming on formal occasions British royal visitors and foreign heads of state and organising their programme. He is responsible for the promotion of civic, commercial, voluntary and social activities in the 32 borough of London and the Greater London Authority – all except the City – and is part of the fabric of London in all its manifestations. He is still expected to support – the rules do not say how – the local military (regulars, reserves and cadets), civic and charity support organisation, and to do something for “community cohesion and engagement”. All vague but pretty wide-ranging. For that he gets a uniform and 90 staff.

His father was a Nigerian law student who met his English mother while studying in London. They married, had a child, and for a time his father commuted between London and Lagos. “One day, the music stopped. He stayed in Lagos and they got separated.” His mother returned to her home town of Nottingham. They were poor in the classic 19thC style – the front door led straight into the living room, the lavatory was a privy out back, and the bath hung on the outside wall.

He was undaunted. “It doesn't matter where you start from, it is where you want to try to get to that makes the difference.” That “want” in his case was spurred on by his “extremely driven” mother insisting on everyone doing their best all the time. And the boy clearly had potential, which prompted people to help.

A gap year with IBM was followed by scholarship to Cambridge and then back to the computers, first again with IBM, then on to Wang in 1981. He became marketing director for Europe, then vice-president of US marketing, followed by worldwide marketing based in Boston, USA. After he was put in charge of Europe, Africa and the Middle East

based in Brussels, he first restored the sector to profitability, then tried to organise a management buy-out and when that failed, left, in 1992. The buy-out should have succeeded as the rest of the company was moribund and soon after died.

It was while at Wang 1982 that he took to bow ties to stand out from the ruck of identikit computer sales executives around Europe. He got so attached to the style he still wears them. Now his reason is to stand out from the other black businessmen in the UK.

After leaving Wang Mr Olisa founded Interregnum, a merchant bank which was floated on the Aim market in 2000. It concentrated on computers and advanced technology. It had a rocky time during the dotcom boom and bust. He was also an advisor to, and director of, uDate.com, one of the rare British UK's dotcom successes when it was sold to Barry Diller's USA Interactive in 2003.

All in all, he had and has an astonishing number and range of jobs.

Mr Olisa retired from Interregnum in 2006 and now runs Restoration Partners, a small merchant bank, still with technology preference, and architect of the Virtual Technology Cluster model. He was a director of Reuters and is a non-executive director and audit committee member of Thomson Reuters and a non-executive director of the Institute of Directors. He was a director and chairman of the remuneration committee of Canada's largest software developer, Open Text Corporation. More recently, he was appointed non-executive director of Eurasian Natural Resources Corporation, controlled by three billionaire founders, when it was floated in London. After a major disagreement he was ejected and he famously described the company as “more Soviet than City”. The experience led to tighter listing rules.

As well as being on the board of, or is an adviser to, several private technology businesses, and of corporate governance

adviser Independent Audit, Mr Olisa is chairman of the Thebes Group and Shaw Trust. He was master of the Worshipful Company of Information Technologists and has served on boards of philanthropic, educational and regulator organisations.

Apart from his day job, he is chairman of Thames Reach, a charity working to shelter and resettle the homeless in London by engaging with the newly homeless before they have the chance to become accustomed to it – “no second night out”. Beyond rescuing them from sleeping rough, there is help to restore their self-esteem. For his work with Thames Reach he received an OBE in 2010.

On top of that he is founder and chairman of the Powerlist Foundation, which organised a sixth-form leadership college in the City in September. It is backed by Goldman Sachs, IBM and several entrepreneurs including the former Dragons’ Den judge Piers Linneyto. Powerlist was created as a “civilian Sandhurst” for young people with “leadership potential”; for “all those kids with sparkly eyes who are just going to go on to greater and greater disappointment. We want to drag them out really and give them a chance”. He was part of the government’s Women’s Enterprise Taskforce, governor of the Peabody Trust and

non-executive director of the West Lambeth NHS Trust. He is a board member of IPSA, the body trying to keep a check on MPs’ expenses, pay and pensions. That is for a man of 64.

The latest job to be added was the lord-lieutenancy, and he says he relishes the relative freedom and power to make a difference. “I have cast around to find that big lever to make a difference. And now I’ve been given that big lever, I can co-ordinate lots and lots of things.” In that programme is to develop hope and connection to the alienated, and educating deprived children about Britain. He is concerned about doing something for communities that live here but do not feel part of London or Britain. As he puts it, he wants to build bridges across communities. That work is what he plans to talk about at the Kensington Society annual general meeting.

Two years ago, he and his wife, Julia, donated £2m to his old Cambridge college to fund a computer facility and library. Mr Olisa lives in Hampton Wick, west London, with his wife, Julia. They have two daughters and five grandchildren. He says he relaxes at a holiday home in Dorset, skiing and playing golf but one wonders when if ever he has free time and the Kensington Society is extremely fortunate to have him as our AGM speaker.

The Kensington Society AGM will be held on 25 April, 2017 in the Town Hall, 6.30 for 7.00. Our speaker will be the Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London Ken Olisa who will speak on *Building bridges for a fairer London*.



Feature

By
Dr Rita Gardner CBE, director Royal Geographical Society

The Home of Geography

THE SOCIETY'S HISTORY IS SYNONYMOUS with the history of British scientific exploration, reflecting the society's objective in its royal charter of "advancing geographical science". Less well known, perhaps, is the society's pivotal role in gaining recognition and incorporation of geography as a formal subject both at school and at university in England, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We continue to support, develop and promote field research and expeditions, geographical education at school and university, and the sharing of geographical knowledge today to many different audiences, in ways that fit the 21st Century.

Inevitably, the society is best known for its research and expedition activities, both through



The nightwatchman, a member of Ernest Shackleton's crew, is returning to his quarters on the ship *Endurance* which is trapped in the Antarctic ice.

its own projects and the many expeditions it supported with grants and equipment, focused historically on Africa, the Indian sub-continent, central Asia and the polar regions.

For example, in 1893 the then president, Sir Clements Markham, “determined to promote the cause of Antarctic exploration”, and started the exhaustive planning for the first scientific expedition to “Terra Incognita”, led by Captain Robert Falcon Scott (1901–04). This was followed by funding and support to Sir Ernest Shackleton for his *Nimrod* and later *Endurance* expeditions.

The combined legacy from these, and other scientific expeditions, forms the core of the society’s historical collection of some two million items, including the world’s largest private map collection and a wealth of artefacts, photographs, archival material, and books. Today, these materials are used as a source by contemporary researchers. Recently, for example, scientists at the University of Reading used data in log books from the voyages of Scott and Shackleton to model sea ice patterns of the time in order to compare and assess the impact of climate change on polar ice.

The society recently digitised its collection of unique glass plate and celluloid negatives taken by photographer Frank Hurley on Shackleton’s ill-fated *Endurance* expedition of 1914–1917, which have been held by the society since Shackleton’s return to the UK.

At the time it was touch and go as to whether the society’s council would vote a grant in favour of the expedition, critical as it was of its scientific credentials. £1,000 was given, and with it the society’s important endorsement.

The newly digitised images formed the heart of the society’s acclaimed recent exhibition *Enduring Eye: the Antarctic Legacy of Sir Ernest Shackleton and Frank Hurley*, which has been touring selected UK cities. The exhibition enabled a wide audience to engage with these remarkable images of Antarctica, and the amazing story of hardship and leadership they record, one hundred years after they were saved from the sinking ship.

In Africa sponsorship included David Livingstone. His beginnings from working in a factory as a child to becoming a famous explorer made him a national hero. His books were bestsellers and he spoke passionately against slavery in lectures to the society in 1847, and more widely across the country, encouraging social change. Livingstone’s geographical work in Africa was recognised by the award of the society’s prestigious Founder’s Medal for his ‘Recent Explorations in Africa’ in 1856. On applying for fellowship of the society, such was his standing that every single member of the society’s council signed his certificate as a mark of their respect. Today, the Livingstone archive collections at the society are used to provide context and illustrate Livingstone’s role for new audiences, including those community groups researching African family history.

Freya Stark in Jebel Druze



As an explorer and travel writer, Freya Stark was one of the first European women to explore the Yemeni Hadhramaut and achieved distinction in the 1930s by reaching the hinterland of Southern Arabia. In 1937 Stark, sought funding for a return expedition to the region, approaching Baron Wakefield of Hythe who had earned the soubriquet of “Cheers”. Wakefield was the millionaire owner of Castrol Oil and had developed a reputation for supporting women’s expeditions. Charmed by Stark, Wakefield sponsored her to the tune of £1,500, later confiding to a friend that he had given Stark the money not because of her expedition plans but because she looked so unlike his concept of an explorer. Surpassing the achievements of many contemporary male explorers, she also travelled widely in western Iran. She spoke fluent Arabic and Persian, and was also notable for her skills as a cartographer. A Fellow of the society, she was also awarded the society’s Gold Medal in 1942.

Each year now the society supports, through grants, some 70 field research projects and scientific expeditions across the world, and it advises and trains people on many others. There are few countries where those projects have not taken place, typically in collaborative teams with local students or researchers. Last year more than 150 geographers and others from 20 UK higher education institutions were carrying out studies in 40 different countries, in locations as diverse as China’s Pearl River delta, the remote island of St Helena in the South Atlantic, and Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. Their projects are equally diverse and range from investigations of ground water resources and indigenous land rights, to research on the geomorphology of desert wadis and forest habitat loss.

From time to time the society engages in larger collaborative, international field programmes. The current one is the first ever to focus on cities; the reason being that by 2050, 5.2 billion people are expected to live in urban areas in Africa and Asia, almost double that of today. The movements of migrants, typically into slum settlements on the margins of rapidly growing cities, are some of the most important and least studied patterns of migration on both continents. Migrants on the Margins is a collaboration between the society, selected UK universities and international partners. It is attempting to assess the impacts of such migration on the cities, communities and the individuals themselves, and to understand more fully how poor migrants can succeed in moving out of poverty in such settings. The project will involve mapping, field surveys and interviews in Colombo (Sri Lanka), Dhaka (Bangladesh), Harare (Zimbabwe) and Hargeisa (Somaliland). The first fieldwork of this three-year project starts in January 2017.

The society plays many other roles too today. For example, it has been instrumental in the



An A level master class

recent revisions to the school curriculum in England and Wales, helping to ensure that sound knowledge, fieldwork and data skills are part of both GCSE and A Level geography courses. Today geography is recognised as an enabling subject that opens up a wide career choice because it equips graduates with a strong range

of skills, as well as helpful knowledge of our changing places, communities, and environments at home and globally.

Teachers in about half the secondary schools in England make use of our online resources and training; and we organise some 200 events a year for the public in London, across England and Wales and in Hong Kong and Singapore. And for people interested in exploring their local area, do have a look at our self-guided walks, including a fascinating one of the Exhibition Road area (www.discoveringbritain.org).

For society members and guests, our London lecture series attracts high-profile speakers and some 650 people each Monday evening in the Ondaatje Theatre. Membership is open to anyone with an interest in geography or learning through travel (www.rgs.org/joinus) and members' subscriptions help support our charitable work. Other income comes from the society's commercial activities, including venue hire; from our charitable operations, including publishing of scholarly journals and conferences; and from fundraising. We do not receive core government funding, so each year we generate the money to support our work, currently some £5.5m, and we use that to inspire and engage an estimated 3 million users with a better understanding of the world. And that is needed today probably more than ever.

Kensington's Lowther Lodge has been the headquarters of the Royal Geographical Society (with Institute of British Geographers) for over a century and is one of the finest Victorian buildings in London. Grade II* listed, the grand 1874 house looks out over Hyde Park and the Albert Memorial, and originated as the London home of the Lowther family of Cumbria. The austere 1930s extension on the corner of Kensington Gore is colloquially known as 'hot and cold corner', taking its name from the statues of Shackleton and Livingstone on the outside. Built to celebrate the society's centenary, it includes the large Ondaatje Theatre, in which generations of geographers, explorers, travellers and scientists have reported their findings to curious audiences. The exuberant, award-winning glass pavilion of 2004, fronting Exhibition Road, and the lovely public reading room beneath it, are the newest additions and accessible to all.

For more information on the society's work, how to join and support its activities or to see what events are taking place, please visit www.rgs.org or email enquiries@rgs.org



Richard Dawkins in the Ondaatje theatre

Feature

By
Amanda Frame

Design Museum

CCULTURAL SITES are created seldom and generally only after decades of debate, and arguments over money. That makes the Design Museum doubly remarkable as it was created in a period that saw massive economic downturns and had limited government support. It is the result of ten years' effort by its director, Deyan Sudjic, formerly of the Observer, and a dedicated team led by Alica Black. It is the final realisation of a campaign over more than 60 years by Sir Terence Conran for greater recognition of the importance of design. The designer turned retailer and restaurateur helped to organise the Boilerhouse design gallery at the Victoria & Albert Museum in 1981. That was the precursor to the Design Museum at Shad Thames near Tower Bridge in 1989, which Conran both founded and funded.

On a project spend of £83 million the new museum has now carved out a reorganised site from carcase of the Imperial Institute building known to us all as the Commonwealth Institute on High Street Kensington, and finally eliminating the persistent leak from its hyperbolic paraboloid roof. Sir Terence labelled it "the most important moment in my career in design".

OMA, the architect firm led by Rem Koolhaas, designed the setting around the existing building with the addition of three buildings of the luxury flats that helped to fund it. The building itself is listed and a public asset,

which meant that its developer, Chelsfield, could secure planning permission for the flats only if it ensured public use for the existing building. To accommodate the three residential blocks required the destruction of the listed gardens and the loss of the listed administration wing which supported one of the four legs of the tent. The result is viewed by many as a rather unhappy marriage between old – well, 1960s – and the new blocks of luxury flats. As Rowen Moore commented in the Guardian "Like an old widow married for her fortune, the 1960s structure seems more valued for its usefulness in the negotiation than loved for its beauty".

Access to the museum is through the base of the block of flats closest to Kensington High Street and then along a path through a reduced garden area where one finally glimpses of the sweep of the roof and the entrance which is discreetly separated from the flats. John Pawson, designer of the inside, who is known for his minimalist aesthetic, scrapped everything that had been there and started afresh to create a 10,000 square metre building with a striking atrium taking up a large portion of the centre. Entering the vast space is for most visitors a striking if rather deterring experience. The geometrically appealing staircases and balconies around the theatrical empty space provide almost a feeling of modern sculpture and lead to



Central atrium of the Design Museum

the museum's facilities: education spaces, members' room, library, offices, a not-wholly successful restaurant. But where is the museum?

Pawson said "I love clear spaces. I love the absolute minimum" and his aim was to create "a beautiful building that people will feel good in". This is a man who does not allow any objects on his kitchen counters and it shows. The grand sweep may be abstractly handsome and people may feel good in it – there is a grandeur in the structure. As commented in the press, the atrium will make a great space for corporate-sponsored parties. However, the atrium lacks any hint of what lays behind the oak panels. Other than a splash of colour at the entrance to the permanent collection at the very top, there is no suggestion of what resides on the other floors. There are promises to incorporate signage to direct the public to the exhibitions but when signage is the only solution it is often an indication that the design has failed.

Mr Moore said "As detached and solipsistic as it is, the atrium feels like an exhibit itself, a bit oversized for its significance, of a particular strand in interior architecture. He suggests it should come with a label: Atrium, John Pawson, oak, white paint and glass, Late Capitalist Period."

The green expanse of Holland Park is just outside but is excluded from the design. Nothing hangs from the roof of the vast empty atrium, and no display is visible. Contributors to social media have said the use of space makes no sense. On further exploration, the building appears to be less of a museum and more of an educational facility or possibly a reference point.

The permanent display which is free to the public, has been wedged into a section of the top floor, and though undoubtedly interesting, it seems incidental, inadequate and cramped. There are designs for chairs, Philippe Starck's

long-shanked lemon squeezer, car manufacturing details including the chassis of a Model T Ford alongside a Tesla driverless car, a display of cameras, audio devices, and a set of objects showing the evolution from analogue to digital.

One aim has clearly been to provide space for special exhibitions – the fee paying areas. At ground level, steps descend towards a basement containing exhibition galleries and a lecture theatre. The exhibitions installed for the opening period of the new space includes on the first floor 11 international designers showing something they consider relevant to the problems of current society. Another exhibition called Fear and Love by the chief curator Justin McGuirk, is a comment on feelings aroused by new technologies.

Exhibitions are not immediately visible either, and a large moving sign by the

permanent exhibition's designer, Morag Myerscough, tries to draw attention but is behind the top-floor balcony and looks like a one-off exhibit. The available exhibition space may not be welcoming enough for serious or ambitious exhibitions especially of substantial objects.

The Design Museum held several private receptions with the Duke of Edinburgh officially opening the museum on 14 November. The Kensington Society was honoured to hold the first publicly-offered reception on the 29 November for 200 members and friends. The society and its members are pleased the museum came to Kensington. We do have our concerns about some of the aspects, however as we know from all our great museums, things can change, and with time and careful thought, we are assured that the Design Museum will be a great success.



The Kensington Society opening celebration of the Design Museum

Feature

By
Peter Ruback

Twentieth Century Society

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY SOCIETY was founded in 1979, as the Thirties Society, with the objective of protecting and educating the public about the best post 1914 architecture and design. We are a national organisation with over two thousand members.

We are best known for campaigning to protect modernist buildings such as (in Kensington and Chelsea) the Commonwealth Institute and its surrounding landscaped gardens, Preston Bus Station, and most recently the remarkable office and retail development by James Stirling at No 1 Poultry in the City. But in fact the society covers and is interested in all styles: art deco, post modern, neo-Georgian and even those buildings that defy classification. The society also researches and advises on specific buildings, putting buildings forward for listing or responding to consultations on listed building consent.

We propose buildings for listing to Historic England, the government agency responsible for advising ministers on listing. These may be buildings under threat, or where we have uncovered new research or evidence about them.

It is difficult to be precise about what features make buildings listable. At one end, innovation in technology, or a building which is creative, well detailed, perhaps richly designed, and clearly one of the better ones by a prolific known architect, will make for a straightforward case. But we also learn about buildings by “discovering” them on one of the society’s study events; or local residents alert us to an interesting building; or they can be identified through academic research. For buildings that fit into a particular style or technology, we would look for something exceptional and well executed. Scarcity can also in my view help make the case.

The society is also consulted formally on proposals that involve any demolition of listed buildings of our period and informally on a wider class of proposals.

A property owner or developer seeking to alter a listed building in a way that affects its architectural or historical significance will need Listed Building Consent from the local authority as well as any planning permission or other consent. We give the local authority our view about the proposals. This will take into account the proposed degree of retention of the original fabric, as well whether the qualities that are significant in a building and the extent and manner in which it is proposed to be altered.

This should not be taken to imply that that a listed building must be fossilised. Sometimes change is needed to meet modern energy performance, health and safety or other objectives. Other changes can be extending a building or finding a new use, for example in converting

office buildings to housing or reconfiguring a church to meet the current needs of the communities they serve. In general finding a viable use for a building is the best way of ensuring its future.

The society is lucky to be able to call on its Casework Committee to advise on proposing buildings for listing or listed building consent cases. The committee comprises planners, architects, engineers and architectural historians as well as people with a history of working with clients for new and altered buildings.

Aside from casework, the society has a lecture and events programme. In 2016 we held two lecture series. Our Spring 2017 series covers an introduction to twentieth century architectural styles, given by experts in the field – a good reason to join the society.

Our events in 2016 included a visit to le Havre to see the post-war reconstruction work of Auguste Perret, and another to Budapest to see a splendid range of art deco and Bauhaus style buildings. Closer to home we visited Ealing to see art deco and earlier buildings. We aren't just interested in concrete and modernism!

Earlier in the year, I led a study event of post-war buildings in Kensington with writer and C20 president Gillian Darley. This was inspired by the writings of Ian Nairn, who came to prominence as a young and passionate architectural journalist who coined the term 'subtopia'. His 'Outrage' special issue of the Architectural Review in 1955 set new standards for polemical and campaigning writing about the degraded state of the built environment. He was a thoughtful critic of high quality modern architecture and a discerning conservationist, emphasising the wider picture and the 'townscape' qualities that he saw in many streets and town centres. He had been commissioned in 1964 to write a short guide on Modern Buildings in London for London Transport. This covers some of the very early modernist buildings from the 1930s – when such





23 Hillgate Street

buildings were daring, experimental and radical and goes up to some of the best executed and detailed early 1960s buildings. This is one of the earliest books that I read on architecture and it holds a special appeal for me.

There are still some comparatively under-studied buildings in Holland Park and Campden Hill which we looked at on the event. Our event started at the Commonwealth Institute by Robert Matthew Johnson Marshall. The society was involved in 2007 in challenging the redevelopment of the site, in particular the demolition of the low level building and the complete alteration of the

registered landscape garden designed by Sylvia Crowe that came up to Kensington High Street. It was and remains the society's view that more of the landscape, in particular its open and welcoming aspect, could and should have been retained.

From there we did a detour to Melbury Road and Ilchester Place. Ian Nairn wrote glowingly about the Park Close flats of 1959 by Colin St John Wilson and Arthur Baker. Although simple, neatly detailed buildings, the two towers of Park Close relate well to the plane trees and to the street. They work less by fussy detailing, than by thoughtful setting and precise execution. The same practice's small block of flats in Hereford Square near Gloucester Road (deeply admired by Nairn) were sadly recently demolished, despite having been listed earlier.

At the other end of Melbury Road, Farley Court – again two blocks closely set together – of almost the same date by Julian Keable is regarded by Nairn as very stylish and immediately identifiable as a late 1950s development. Farley Court has been somewhat altered in the last twenty years, but its plans (available in Kensington Library) show its original design including a remarkable penthouse flat of an organic shape nestling on an otherwise rectilinear block. I would love to know more about the penthouse, if anyone can let me know.

Over 50 years after they were built these two blocks seem to have fitted well as neighbours of high Victorian houses. Between them is Stavordale Lodge (1967) by the rather unknown Dalling and Partners. This is a block of a rather luxurious appearance on the site of two houses, with an interesting gently curved plan and fine marble mosaic tiling. Pevsner comments that it is “uncompromisingly modernist, with cold grey and white cubic forms, frankly impertinent in this environment,” but I feel that it is a congenial neighbour in scale and relation



Stavordale Lodge, 10-13 Melbury Road

to the Victorian houses and it does not grate in the way that new buildings in historic settings might today.

From this part of Holland Park, we went via Sir Hugh Casson's Youth Hostel, onto Campden Hill to see the two white modernist blocks of The Mount (1961–4), by Douglas Stephen and Partners. These are interesting in that they are a conscious return to an earlier pre-war modernism and partial rejection of its post war direction.

Nearby Tor Gardens in Sheffield Terrace (1954) by an unknown architect in the LCC Architects department is a three storey block of council flats, praised by Nairn as "Just as unpretentious and decorative as the original Georgian houses on Campden Hill; canted out staircases on the entrance side, balconies on the garden (or rather lawn) side. The tragedy is that this is exactly the kind of house that most East Enders would like and which the LCC does not give them."

Finally, Nairn also wrote about one of my favourite modern buildings in London: Peter Jones by Slater, Crabtree and Moberly, 1936. Aside from its technological advances as probably the first curtain wall building in London, Nairn praises the way the double curve elevation handles the corner between King's Road and Sloane Square: "you can see it a thousand times and it will never fail to give a little kick of exhilaration." I agree.

Peter Ruback is chairman Twentieth Century Society

www.c20society.org.uk



Trellick Tower by Erno Goldfinger

Feature

By
Michael Becket

Kensington TA Barracks

IN 1798 THE MILITARY THREAT from French aggression generated the creation of the Corps of Kensington Volunteer Association. It was a period for more unofficial soldiery than a state-funded military. The presentation of their colours by the Duchess of Gloucester in the following year on Palace Green was painted by Frederick Countze and the picture still hangs in the mayor's parlour. They seems to have been either a very optimistic or a complacent group of men because after the Treaty of Amiens in 1802, they decided the threat was over and disbanded. A year later, realising Napoleon was not quite so easily pacified, the Kensington Corps of Volunteer Infantry was formed, but that too succumbed to premature relief, feeling Napoleon's rout at Leipzig and his exile to Elba meant the problem was definitely over. So that force was disbanded again in 1814.

For much of the 19th century, Britain had only a pretty small standing army, backed up by a militia composed of volunteers probably similar to the Territorial Army of today. The men supplied their own arms and equipment though some rich landowners provided uniforms for their private regiments. These strange forces persisted through the Crimean War which alerted even the politicians that such amateurs would not suffice as adequate defence in the modern world. As a result, the militia was being replaced from 1859 by a better-trained set of regiments – most of them still volunteers. The change in attitude was in part prompted by Napoleon III and Austria going to war over Italian independence, which threatened to embroil Britain.

That was the time the London Irish Rifles was born, surviving long enough to fight in the Boer Wars and in World War 1. True to form, it was disbanded at the end of the war only to be revived at the start of World War 2. In 2012 a platoon from the London Irish Rifles marched down Adam and Eve Mews to take up residence at the old Territorial Army building.

It was also in 1859 that Lord Truro, a wealthy landowner, created the 4th Middlesex Volunteer Rifle Corps, originally based in Islington. Two years later it was amalgamated with other such groups into a battalion with drill halls, uniforms and equipment provided by the



Princess Louise's Kensington Signal Squadron Volunteers can trace back its history to 1798 when the Kensington Volunteer Association was enrolled in answer to the threat from France. The squadron's motto "Quid Nobis Ardui" meaning "Nothing is too hard for us." In 1908 Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyll consented to the use of her name by the regiment and thereafter became known as Princess Louise's Kensingtons.



The Presentation of Colours to the Kensington Volunteers May 30 1799

government. In 1879 the regiment moved its headquarters south to Swallow Street, off Piccadilly, and when it amalgamated with a Fulham regiment was rechristened The West London Rifles. In 1881 it was part of The King's Royal Rifle Corps. Mistrusting the War Office, the regiment and its supporters raised enough money to create a purpose-built new headquarters in Adam and Eve Mews off High Street Kensington in 1885 and became Kensington Volunteers, or Kensington Rifles. By then the volunteer soldiers in Britain numbered a quarter of a million men and that included remnants of the Militia which still fought in the Boer Wars of 1880 to 1902, the country regiments, and the urban regiments.

Fighting in South Africa came as a shock to the military, who made a disastrous mess of it, and to the more humane parts of the government who suddenly became aware of the hardship of many citizens. We worry about obesity and lack of exercise these days but during the second Boer War, 1899-1902, three-quarters of volunteers for the army were declared physically unfit to cope with being a soldier. An investigation of the cause had a diametrically opposite conclusion from the present one: poverty, poor housing and an inadequate diet. But that was not the reason the war was such a disgraceful shambles – that was the result of military and political incompetence much further up the command chain.

In 1905, Lord Truro's foundation was renamed yet again to become The Kensington Regiment, and Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyll, who lived in Kensington Palace, allowed the regiment to use her name and coat of arms, while Kensington borough permitted the use of its

own coat of arms and its motto *quid nobis ardui* (what is hard for us). Lord Truro and Lord Ranelagh opted for regiment's uniform to be grey with red facings and trimmings of buff laces with silver appointments, a shako with a glazed peak, black belt and a starched white haversack. They became known as the Grey Brigade but, alas such individuality was soon replaced with the standard khaki.

By this time the regiment was heavily aristocratic and part of the 22nd Battalion. All the army was suffering huge slaughter in World War 1 but the battalion had such heavy casualties that it was disbanded in 1918 despite pleas to Commander in Chief Douglas Haig. So no surprise there. [In the Kensington Society annual for 2013 Richard Northedge described the regiment's travails in World War 1]

But the Kensingtons were back in France in 1940 and fought through Algiers and Italy. Another part guarded the Tower of London. At the end of the war the long-established procedure changed – instead of disbanding it the regiment was just incorporated into the Signals Corps. For World War 2 another regiment was formed in Kensington, the 99th Anti-Aircraft Regiment, sometimes called the London Welsh. They however did follow the traditions of the earlier army units in the borough, being disbanded at the end of the war and then revived in 1947, only to disappear again in 1955.

The military building constructed for the Kensingtons is still there, just behind Kensington High Street, and has more or less come full circle since it is now a home for the Territorial Army. Not however the home of the Kensingtons' successor regiment. The link with that is a touch tenuous and is now called 41 (Princess Louise's Kensington) Signal Squadron, though that still has the same motto and flag but its home is now mainly in Marlpit Lane, Coulsdon with one troop in Kingston.



The barracks as they are now

Planning Reports

Government changes to planning by Michael Bach

In recent years the planning report has been dominated by changes that the government has imposed on us by enabling buildings to change use without requiring planning consent. To counteract the mounting problems due these ‘freedoms’ to change use, the council has had to take measures, Article 4 Directions, which have the effect of restoring the need for planning consent for change of use.

In last year’s report I flagged up that the council was considering a borough-wide Article 4 Direction to control the loss of offices. This has not yet happened, but they have become the panacea to counteract these ‘freedoms’ which should never have been introduced to get a quick boost to housing.

Whilst the council has acted to deal with some the worst impacts of changes promoted by the government, we consider that the policies for managing the mix of uses in town centres not only fail to provide a strong enough policy basis to resist some of these changes, but even promote them, such as by reducing the minimum proportion of retail (A1) uses in secondary retail frontages from 66% to 50%.

As a result of permission to change a shop’s use without needing consent, we have more estate agents. The society has asked the council for help to resist this. Most of these changes are subject to a limit of 150sqm or about two small shopfronts. There is no size limit for banks, so a large proportion of the former Tesco in Kensington High Street could turn into a bank – even though banks are well represented on the High Street’s main “shopping” frontages. The government thinks we need more competition – but you can have too much of one good thing at the expense of another.

Assets of Community Value by Michael Bach

In response to the government’s proposals to allow launderettes to change into housing the society encouraged the council to issue an Article 4 Direction, which has the effect of restoring the need for planning consent, which stopped such a change for seven launderettes, whilst another seven which are in conservation areas were exempted. Fortunately we have nipped this in the bud.

To counteract mounting problems the council had to introduce Article 4 Directions for pubs which are Assets of Community Value.



One of the few remaining launderettes, this in Golborne Road

Pubs by Michael Bach

Despite the added protection to specific pubs of Article 4 Directions and ACVs, pubs are still under threat from proposals to cannibalise them, stripping them down to smaller pubs without staff flats above. Historically the first floor of pubs was used as function rooms and the second floor for the publican or staff accommodations. Accommodation is more important today than ever. A pub with staff on site can receive out of hours deliveries, offer to staff or the publican accommodations at a price that is unaffordable within London, and better control staff cost. The planning department is often persuaded upper floors are an investment and allow the change of use. This makes the pub less viable as the court agreed when challenged by the Academy owners.



The Academy pub – closed

Academy by Amanda Frame

At the end of the summer the Academy pub on the Princedale Road closed. In October the owners notified the council of their intent to sell the pub. The Norland Conservation Society had worked through the years successfully to fight off the ever more aggressive moves by the owners. With the Asset of Community Value (ACV) in place and all applications for change of use or the reduction of the pub's space being refused, the next move was to market the pub for an inflated price. The process allows for interested parties to be given a fair chance to make a bid to buy it on the open market thus delaying sale while the community prepares a bid to buy it. The right does not restrict in anyway who the owner of the asset can sell his property to, or at what price and it does not confer a right of first refusal to community interest groups. The notice allowed six weeks for the community to ask to bid. Norland Conservation Society decided to not exercise its right. The Kensington Society trustees decided to exercise the right and we registered our intention. We are now in what remains of the moratorium period, of the six months, during which time we can prepare a bid to buy the pub before this goes on sale on the open market.

It is important to note that by exercising our rights to bid there are no financial obligations nor are we restricted from exploring other means of securing the sale to a purchaser more in line with the community needs. The ACV status remains in place for the five year period – three remaining – and can be renewed even if the pub is closed. If you know of an operator who would be interested in assisting us, please have them contact us.

The Kensington Park Hotel by Amanda Frame

RBKC has been informed of the proposed sale of the Kensington Park Hotel. The Asset of Community Value register has been updated to note the proposed sale. A qualifying community group, KPH United Ltd, has triggered the six-month moratorium.

The Eagle by Amanda Frame

The good news is the Eagle on Ladbroke Grove is currently undergoing refurbishment and will reopen as a neighbourhood pub.

Conservation Areas

The council's three-year project to provide an up-to-date appraisal for each conservation area is nearing completion. These conservation area appraisals (CAAs) will supersede the existing Conservation Area Proposals Statements (CAPS), but unlike CAPS the new appraisals do not contain any proposals, as required by law, for enhancing conservation areas. The society has encouraged the council to produce management strategies for each conservation area to take advantage of opportunities for enhancement to buildings or to the public realm. We had also hoped that the CAAs would identify opportunities for listing of buildings and for reviewing the boundaries of existing conservation areas. Both actions have been resisted.

2017 marks the 50th anniversary of the Civic Amenities Act 1967 which introduced conservation areas. We hope to work with the council to celebrate this – with 75% of the borough in conservation areas this should be a landmark worth celebrating.

Streetscape by Michael Bach

The society has been fighting a running battle to drive up the quality of our streetscape whether improving shopfronts, tackling flyposting, opposing the introduction of large compactor litter bins with adverts and fighting the spread of advertising panels with a telephone on the back.

The latest onslaught has been J C Decaux's proposals to add a large, freestanding digital advertising panel to the end of bus shelters. Many of these have been Transport for London shelters, where TfL has entered an eight-year contract, but about 80 of these shelters are owned by the council.

Whilst the council is very strict when cafes want to put tables and chairs on the pavement, it seems to have been less strict with the introduction of these permanent obstructions which take up a high proportion of the space and seem to take little note of the proximity of these to other advertisement panels. We seem to be going backwards from having cleared much of the clutter to a proliferation advertisements. The council should not be giving our pavements away to advertisement panels.

Housing by Michael Bach and Amanda Frame

The Mayor of London's current London Plan sets the borough a target of producing a net increase of 733 housing units a



year. The plan, which was drafted in 2008, not only had a lower target but promoted 80% of the market housing as large units with three or more bedrooms. It did discourage buildings divided into flats from being changed to single occupation (“deconversion”), where the number lost was five or more units, but was silent about schemes with a loss of four units or fewer.

The net result of these policies was large units with three or more bedrooms with a very high proportion (60%+) sold to overseas buyers as “second homes” or as investments. New developments were using the system to create luxury large units rather than developments which could meet the need for housing by people living and working in London. In the six years since the Local Plan was adopted many of our largest sites have been developed or have planning permission and have produced fewer units than we could have with a better mix of sizes.

The revised housing policies within the draft local plan do, however, seek to change the proposed housing mix. However despite highly unbalanced mix since 2008 which has produced 80% large units, the proposal is still to suggest that half the new units should be large.

Since 2010 there have been continuing losses from deconversion and a surge in losses from amalgamations. The losses were not recorded and the society urged the council to calculate these losses. Considering the rising London Plan target, the council decided in August 2014 to start classifying amalgamations as requiring planning consent. Since then, despite most of these being refused, there have been over 200 such applications which would have meant a loss of more than 200 units in the last 18 months. The society supports the tightening of policy, particularly because it resists the loss of smaller, relatively more affordable units.

We are not, however, confident that the council’s proposals will change the size mix sufficiently to compensate for the distorted mix over the last ten years and there is still an overhang of schemes yet to be completed.

The Chinese, the Singaporeans and even the Russians seem to have abandoned their thrust for our homes. Their own economic woes, fear of Brexit and the Stamp Duty Land Tax, have slowed the upper end of the property market. But getting a foothold in the housing market remains unattainable for most Londoners. Our own sons and daughters have already had to move west, east, across the river or even to other countries. SDLT is one of the basic problems. The market has contracted to those who want to down-size but remain in the area they have known most of their lives. It is actually less expensive not to move. And the “homes for first-time buyers” can barely touch the properties even in the north of the borough.

Starter Homes/Affordable Housing by Michael Bach

The Housing and Planning Act 2016 included an initiative called “starter homes”, where people between 23 and 40, if they had an income of £90,000 or less could receive a subsidy of 20% to £450,000 maximum price, and, if they retained ownership for five years they could sell the property without having to pay back the subsidy. This “gift” housing is not likely to qualify for Kensington as most homes are above the threshold. It appears the government is beginning to realise that “starter homes” are likely to be a non-starter in many areas.

Building upwards by Michael Bach

The government floated an idea of “building upwards” in London – additional flats on top of existing buildings. Despite the fact that such development was inappropriate, we are still waiting to see if the government will proceed with this initiative.

Short lets by Thomas Blomberg

In the November 2016 Kensington Society Newsletter, we highlighted the avalanche of short lets that began immediately after the government removed the London short-let ban in May 2015. Our research showed there were 42,646 short-let listings for London on Airbnb alone on 2 June 2016. More than half, 21,646, were whole flats and houses, which, according to the new regulation, may not be let for more than 90 days per year (letting of single rooms has always been allowed). The total number of short lets in London, all websites put together, were some 70,000. As the other websites almost exclusively offer whole homes, the number of whole homes offered were probably around 45,000.

Shortly after the newsletter was sent out, the Airbnb-critical website “Inside Airbnb”, which harvests and analyses data from the Airbnb website, published new data for London, showing the situation on 3 October 2016. This revealed that the number of Airbnb listings in London of whole homes had grown to 25,285, whereof 2,470 were in RBKC. This, combined with a similar increase for websites such as Flipkey, HomeAway, VRBO, Onefinestay, Veeva and Foxtons, means that the total number of whole London homes offered as short-lets now must be close to 60,000.

In November, the London mayor Sadiq Khan expressed his concern that Airbnb is worsening the housing crisis by reducing the number of available long-term rentals and “welcomed” a dialogue between the boroughs and Airbnb “about how existing legislation could better be enforced and whether the legislation needs to be revisited”.

In December, Airbnb suddenly announced the company would begin an internal monitoring that would stop London hosts from letting properties for more than 90 days a year, unless they can provide permits for this from their councils.

This move must be seen in context. During 2016, Berlin, New York, San Francisco, Paris, Barcelona, Santa Monica, Anaheim (home of Disneyland, California), Amsterdam and Vienna, all introduced legislation to regulate short lets, either by banning short-letting of whole homes, require registration of hosts or require Airbnb to collect taxes of guests or hosts. Airbnb is either suing these cities or trying to appease them by offering milder forms of self-regulation without inspection instead – anything to avoid laws that will hamper the growth of their business. Their offer to stop hosts in London from letting homes more than 90 days is a typical example of such self-regulation without inspection, so nobody will know if the self-regulation works.

Also, the Airbnb offer does not affect the other operators, who jointly offer as many short-let homes as Airbnb does – and who in many cases offer the same homes as Airbnb. So when those hosts hit the 90-day ceiling at Airbnb, they can just continue letting on the other websites – tax free and to the detriment of their neighbours.

Local plan by Amanda Frame

The Local Plan, adopted in 2010, which we helped to shape, with emphasis on keeping life local, was revised and supplemented with sector studies and the Consolidated Local Plan (July 2015) combined alterations agreed.

Issues and options for the review of the plan were publicly presented and consulted. We objected to the timing over the holiday period and the short consultation time, to no avail. On

28 October the draft policies were issued for consultation. There were 38 weeks to consider the changes necessary.

To say we were shocked with the proposed changes as outlined in the draft would be an understatement. One could actually assume that between 2010, and the first considerations in December 2014 there had been no thought at all about the changes or areas needing updating. The draft did not address most of the growing obstacles which belatedly had become obvious. There were not enough changes in the type and size of housing to compensate for nearly ten years of so much housing going to the international investment market. And it would have followed the government's encouragement of loss of shopping. The "places" chapters would not provide an effective steer for their future development.

The Kensington Society organised meetings with affiliated societies and our own members to comment as broadly as we could. The document was 616 pages and we commented on most of them. We commented critically on the housing and economic activity chapters, and in some cases, substantially rewrote the chapters on housing, including Kensington High Street, South Kensington, the ridiculous combined chapter on Notting Hill Gate and Portobello and the chapter on Golborne which had been eliminated.

The chapter on the environment concentrated on flooding but was almost silent on our most growing threat, our dangerous air quality. We assisted other areas as far as the limited time and limited resources allowed – we had had six weeks to comment. Our submission went in before the deadline of on 11 December 2016.

We are promised by the planning department that we will be given the opportunity to comment as the final submission is developed. From January to March 2017 this process will continue, with the planned submission in March 2017 followed by the examination. We hope all our efforts in commenting so fully this last time will be taken into consideration and that the next publication will not be as disappointing as the draft. We want to support the new Local Plan. We do not want to be forced to address our concerns openly in the examination.

Places by Michael Bach

The purpose of the 'places' section in the council's Local Plan is to try to capture the distinctive features of areas and neighbourhoods, and to identify where planning policies can help to enhance and protect these while also encouraging good quality development.

The Council's original draft combined the Portobello and Notting Hill Gate 'places'. The society and many others felt the two have very different qualities. The council has since agreed to separate them. Our suggestions for Notting Hill Gate aimed to identify characteristics local residents and businesses want retained, including cultural venues. There needs to be a complete transformation of its streetscape, yet the council has not yet been able to plan for this.

Portobello by Henry Peterson

For Portobello Road we have tried to identify ways in which the planning system can help to balance the expectations of tourists and visitors, while retaining amenity and quality of life for local residents. The latest plans from the Westway Trust for Portobello Village (beneath the Westway) are much improved from their original proposals, as a result of responses from many community groups and local organisations including the society.



Part of the long parade of food outlets in Kensington High Street

Golborne Road by Henry Peterson

Golborne Road has now become a London destination in its own right, with its combination of niche fashion shops, cafes and restaurants as well as its street market. On weekend mornings it is busy with tourists sampling street food, cafes, brunch venues and restaurants, including Danish and Austrian, as well as the long-established Portuguese, Moroccan and Spanish eating places.

We hope that what happens next in Golborne Road will avoid the Portobello experience of rapidly rising rents and an influx of identikit chain coffee shops. The council's programme of streetscape works has been extensively consulted on, and should avoid over-sanitising the street and destroying its atmosphere in the process. It is one of the most diverse local communities, whose character needs to be sensitively handled.

Kensal by Henry Peterson

In terms of future plans for Kensal, we have suggested the borough's stretch of the Grand Union Canal and its southern towpath should become a conservation area. This would follow existing designations in Hammersmith and in Brent, and would give added planning protection to Meanwhile Gardens as public open space.

The planned development of 7,000 new homes on the Cargiant site (off [Meanwhile Gardens](#)





Meanwhile Gardens

Scrubs Lane, W10) involves significant investment in the canal as a recreational amenity for London. The stretch from Paddington Basin to East Acton needs coherent planning and consistent improvements to the towpath, as a major east/west cycle and pedestrian route.

The area east of the West Cross Route is labelled by the council as Latimer. Imminent decisions on options for ‘estate renewal’ of the Silchester Estate are a major concern of local residents. The neighbouring area north of the Westway is now covered as a ‘place’ by the St Quintin and Woodlands Neighbourhood Plan (see the contribution to this annual report from the St Helens Residents Association).

By the time the council next reviews its Local Plan, it may be that more of the ‘place’ chapters will be replaced by neighbourhood plans prepared by residents’ associations and amenity groups – as is happening in Westminster where 15 neighbourhood areas and forums have now been designated by Westminster City Council.

Kensington High Street by Anthony Walker

The draft chapter within the Local Plan for Kensington High Street proved, like other place chapters, to be a huge disappointment. Having been severely tested in the public inquiry on the Odeon in January 2016, the society was determined that the High Street should have a clear and unambiguous new vision.

The Vision, as set out in the 2010 Local Plan, stated that Kensington High Street would have



The former Tesco shop in Kensington High Street is expected to be taken by Clydesdale Bank

redefined its role by 2028 to distinguish what it offers from that of Westfield, Knightsbridge and the King's Road. This was amended for the Partial Review 2016 to an aspiration merely to maintain its distinct retail offer. That vision is inadequate for the future of what is referred to as Kensington's High Street.

We are fortunate in that Kensington High Street already includes many features which constitute the heart of the community. There is a historic core of strong commercial and retail presence and important cultural amenities. There is also of course the civic heart of the borough, ie the Town Hall and Central Library. We have museums, a Royal Palace, a broad range of churches, and leisure and entertainment centres, a wide variety of restaurants and, we hope before long, there will also be a new cinema. In addition to the main frontages there is a rich mix of supporting streets including Kensington Church Walk and Thackeray Street, and places to sit and relax ranging from the small green at Kensington Church Walk to the large public green spaces of Kensington Gardens to the East and Holland Park to the West.

While much of this functions well and is lively and attractive, there are also parts which are in decline and no longer command the national and even international recognition which is worthy of the borough as a whole. Some distinctive shops have disappeared, side streets are swamped with travel agents and major stores have disappeared from the High Street to be replaced by banks, estate agents and other non-retail activities. Surely we have enough financial services in the High Street already?

Addressing this decline is not an easy matter. Marylebone High Street is often cited as a shopping area which has managed to create its own distinctive brand, but in that case there is mainly one prime landlord, unlike Kensington High Street which is home to a plethora of different interests.

The Kensington Society believes we need an inspirational vision which will effectively bring all these different interests and activities together in mutual support. We need a town centre partnership to produce this vision and a strategy for achieving it. This will mean taking up every

possible opportunity to sustain the existing positive aspects of the High Street while enhancing the area's built and natural environment, and managing local activities so that they continue to respond to changing needs. Areas of distinct character, whether it be in physical form or by activity, should be identified and helped to flourish. There are opportunities already: at such sites as 127 Kensington High Street (Boots) and 265 (The Odeon).

In developing our comments on the Local Plan review we consulted a number of local groups and will continue to liaise with them during the process of refining the proposals for Place chapter in the Local Plan, and also if necessary at the hearing to be conducted by the Planning Inspector later in 2017.

South Kensington by Michael Bach

South Kensington was perhaps the most disappointing of all the place chapters. The 2010 Plan had, against the wishes of the local community, promoted the change of use of shops to cafes and restaurants to meet the needs of visitors to the South Kensington museums at the expense of shops that meet the needs of local residents. The proposed new place chapter would further increase the food and beverage offer for visitors by writing off most of the secondary shopping to the north of the station and reducing the minimum proportion of shops in the remaining secondary frontages from 66% to 50%. We are urging the council to rebalance this district centre. The society supports the aspirations of the local community to maintain and increase the shopping offer and to fight any further increase on cafes and restaurants.

South Kensington Station by Michael Bach

For two years TfL has held monthly meetings with local stakeholders to help develop their proposals to improve the capacity of the station and to conserve and develop their properties immediately around the station. The local community impressed on TfL that step-free access to the underground will be essential, that any development would need to respect the heritage value of the listed station and arcade, the pedestrian tunnel to the museums, the refurbishment of the



Grade listed entrance to South Kensington Station

Thurloe Street buildings and of any development along the Pelham Street frontage.

Within the final TfL development document, unlike previous schemes, the capacity improvements and step-free access would be covered by TfL's budget – with step-free access being to District/Circle Lines by 2022 and the lifts to the Piccadilly Line by 2025.

The use sought for the Arcade, the Bullnose building, Thurloe Street and Pelham Street was controversial. TfL's retail study of South Kensington revealed the obvious, that there is dominance of food and beverage units. We impressed on TfL that they should be seeking a net reduction of such outlets in their buildings, replacing them with shops which would better meet the needs of the local community.

The final development brief – following consultation with residents and the council – will shape the type of development and the choice occupiers that TfL will put to potential development partners.

Development

Basements by Michael Bach

2015 saw the introduction of the council's new policy restricting basements to no more than one storey and not more than 50% of the garden. This was followed up in April 2016 by a Supplementary Planning Document with detailed guidance on the application of the new policy. This emphasises the importance of consultation and liaison with neighbours.

April 2016 also saw a further tightening of the rules on basements with the coming into effect of an Article 4 Direction requiring planning permission for all basements. Until then, basements immediately beneath the house did not need planning permission. In practice, so long as applicants have the right documentation in place, planning permission is rarely refused for basements, so this new development is unlikely to affect numbers. But it will mean that these basement developments will be subject to the normal planning requirements for a construction method statement and a construction traffic management plan (CTMP), and thus allow the council better control over noise and disturbance.

The Planning Enforcement team has also been extremely active in ensuring that, once a CTMP has been agreed, it is strictly adhered to. In one particularly serious case, they even successfully took the developer to court for breaching a temporary stop notice that had been imposed following breaches of the CTMP.

Members of parliament have continued to express concern about the nuisance caused by basement developments. The subject was raised during the passage through the House of Lords of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 and the government was pushed into promising a review of the planning law and regulations which relate to basement developments. In November, it issued a "call for evidence" and a number of the society's affiliate members submitted suggestions on improvements to the current regime. There is, however, probably a limit to how much more can be done through the planning system and many feel strongly that the legislation on party wall awards also needs reforming.

Construction controls by Michael Bach

Finally, the council published a Code of Construction Practice, again in April 2016. This provides detailed guidance on best practice in mitigating construction impacts. It covers all types

of construction in the borough, but will be particularly useful in helping control high-impact basement construction. It reduced permitted hours for noisy works with no noisy work allowed on Saturdays and subjects high-impact sites to strict rules on neighbour liaison, noise monitoring and controlling pollution.

Whether as a result of these new policies or whether because of the economic climate and the fall in high-end house prices, applications for basement developments in the borough have fallen off sharply. They were already declining; the peak year was 2013 with 450 applications; in 2014 there were 393; in 2015 only 252; and in 2016 it was down to 153.

Natural History Museum by Amanda Frame

A major success, following a couple of years of consultation, has been the new scheme for the grounds of the Natural History Museum. The new scheme will provide direct access from the pedestrian tunnel to the entrance, ticket office and shop where the East Lawn is today, with a landscaped area above it. The West Lawn – the Wildlife Garden – will be redesigned and there will be a new entrance to the Museum via the Darwin Centre with a new access from Queen's Gate. The society supported the NHM's project which, through active involvement produced a much better scheme.

North Kensington by Henry Peterson

The strategic planning issues facing North Kensington are twofold:

- Will the Council succeed in its campaign for a Crossrail station at the Kensal Gasworks site? This would be in addition to the planned HS2/Crossrail interchange at Old Oak, north of Wormwood Scrubs, due for completion in 2026.
- What will be the long-term impact of plans currently being finalised by the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation, for the OPDC area (the largest regeneration project in the UK, involving an expected 24,500 new homes as 55,000 new jobs).

Many people forget that North Kensington is unusually poorly-served by rail, Overground, or Underground, compared with much of inner London. There is no station in the borough for any of these transport links north of Latimer Road. Residents are reliant on buses for public transport.

A new Crossrail station at Kensal would make a big difference, as well as providing access for visitors to Golborne and Portobello roads.

In ten years' time, if HS2 proposals were to go according to plan (and this remains an 'if'), the northern part of the borough would be better served with rail and Overground stations. But there will also be huge new demands on the local road network. As North Kensington car drivers know all too well, exits from the borough westward are limited to the Holland Park roundabout, North Pole Road, and the Harrow Road. All these junctions can experience long tailbacks at peak times.

The OPDC has full planning powers,



Artist's impression of completed Old Oak development – around 2035

taken over from the local boroughs and has published a first draft Local Plan. This will be finalised in 2017. While much of the proposed development will not take place for a decade or more (while the stations and associated infrastructure are built) the decisions on densities and building heights are already being made. Planning applications for residential towers of 20–25 storeys are surfacing in Scrubs Lane. Closer to the proposed stations and to the heart of a new ‘mini-city’ at Old Oak, OPDC plans assume building heights of 40–60 storeys.

This level of intensity of development, and resultant building heights, is wholly new to the north-west section of London. Many local residents in Hammersmith, Ealing and Brent do not want to see a repeat at Old Oak of what has been built south of the Thames at Vauxhall, Battersea and Nine Elms. Nor do residents living on the western edge of north Kensington.

Why has London’s planning system allowed a reversion to the residential tower blocks of the 1960s? Will the Mayor of London rethink policies bequeathed by Boris Johnson’s London Plan and his ‘vision’ for a second Canary Wharf at Old Oak? The society’s planning committee will be keeping a close eye on OPDC decisions over the coming months.

Earl’s Court by Amanda Frame

CapCo, the developers of the massive redevelopment in Earl’s Court that spans Kensington and Hammersmith across the West London Railway lines, has recently announced it has “new ambitions”. Read instead, the market has changed and CapCo’s one completed development is not selling. Capco said its “new ambition” is “part of representations to the Mayor’s London Plan consultation” and added “The representations submitted signal how the site could accommodate up to 10,000 homes, additional affordable housing levels and a greater diversity of housing types.” This represents an additional 2,500 homes to a total of 10,000 but no increase in land mass. No increase in site coverage, just more housing units. No proposed increase in



View of Earl’s Court site looking north

infrastructure, nor community facilities (for example: schools, no increase in social services such as NHS, no more transport services, just more traffic and more sewage requirements). And no mention of how these increased infrastructural needs are to be addressed.

The development is part a joint venture between TfL and Hammersmith & Fulham (LBHF) but there is no mention of LBHF in the announcement, just “other stakeholders”. The rumour is that CapCo has fallen out with the new Labour LBHF council. Does this mean that the additional 2,500 homes will be in RBKC? We support more homes especially if it addresses the short-fall in affordable homes, but at what cost? Taller buildings? Less open space? More traffic? As often said in the development world, the detail is the god and there is no god in evidence other than mammon.

Cromwell Road by Amanda Frame

The new owners of the 1970's monster on Cromwell Road, the Forum Hotel, have abandoned the previous owners plans for a huge casino on the protected gardens. The new owners are a joint venture between the Kow family, a family-owned private company based in Hong Kong, the LJ Partnership, a private wealth partnership, made up of families and entrepreneurs from across the world, and the Peterson Group. They have been in consultation with the immediate neighbours who reasonably want improved public realm and to protect the little garden that remains. However, rumour abound but we have been told the developer is proposing to replace the 906 Holiday Inn style rooms with 900 rooms with a spa, conference centre, ballrooms and all the extras of a 5-star hotel in Central London, and on top of all this, some housing thrown in for good measure. The proposal last seen was for four buildings and they have promise all this development without any loss of the protected garden. Unfortunately the last few scheduled meetings have been cancelled by the consultants. We are not flowing with convince.



Empty Earl's Court

Appeals

Notting Hill Gate by Amanda Frame

2016 saw proposals come forward for several controversial developments in Notting Hill Gate, following the adoption of a Supplementary Planning Document for its future.

On Valentine's Day 2017 the appeal hearing about the refusal of the redevelopment of slab-block Newcombe House in Notting Hill Gate begins. It pits the small community of Hillgate Village against the society which had supported the scheme for its benefits, a GP surgery, replacement of shops and offices, new housing and step-free access to the District/Circle Line platform of Notting Hill Gate station.

However, in the meantime Frogmore has been granted permission to re-façade 33 Notting Hill Gate, east block, 92–120 Notting Hill Gate, south block, and 47–69 Notting Hill Gate, north block, and add one or two storeys. We are disappointed that Frogmore has steadfastly refused to improve the retail appearances using the excuse that as existing leases they have no powers to require improvements and have contributed just under £120,000 for public realm improvements.

The society still considers the additional floors are top-heavy.

These three sites should have provided a greater contribution to the scheme for improving the streetscape of Notting Hill Gate. The society is concerned that there is still no strategy for improving the public realm of Notting Hill Gate. Like Kensington High Street, the King's Road, Fulham Road and Exhibition Road, the majority of the money could come from the surplus income from pay-and-display parking. We are hoping that council will bring forward a scheme in the next year.

Odeon and Duke's Lodge by Michael Bach

In similar processes, the entire community rallied against two major applications, the redevelopment of the Odeon cinema site on Kensington High Street and the Candy brother's proposal for the development of the former Duke's Lodge in Holland Park, which included the undeveloped land surrounding the former block of flats and basements to seven storey depth. Both applications were recommended by the borough's head of planning who retired following the refusals by the Planning Committee. If there is a major concern in the future, it is with the appeal process. Following appeals against these two refusals, the Inspectors from the Planning Inspectorate, who were obviously well-schooled in planning law, but perhaps not fully cognisant of the local history and policies, or the effect of the applications on the historic environment, allowed both these appeals. If there is a challenge we all face it is with the appeal process. The locals on Holland Park Avenue now face over 2 years of construction traffic from Duke's Lodge. The CTMP propose over 80 HGV a day for months of construction. The construction process requires the HGV must not enter the site before 9.30am and must leave the site by 4.30pm. This means one lorry leaving the site every 5 minutes or so during the busiest period will go onto and along Holland Park Avenue". The Kensington Society has objected along with the ward councillors and the Ladbroke Association however local opposition has been minimal.

Prepared by Michael Bach, chairman of planning
Committee: Amanda Frame, Henry Peterson, Anthony Walker, Thomas Blomberg,
Sophie Lambert

Reports

From
AFFILIATED SOCIETIES, 2016

ASHBURN COURTFIELD GARDENS RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

During the past year Ashburn Courtfield Gardens Residents Association and its sister organisation, Ashburn Gardens Square Garden Association dealt with a number of issues large and small: a small, historic mews in our area, Astwood Mews, is soon to have four basement digs. In our attempt to mitigate the impact on the neighbours as much as possible our particular attention centres on the construction method and CTMPs. Although the houses are small, the application document pack often comprises hundreds of pages. We always persevere and read them all.

We have also come across several cases, where planning enforcement action was required. Many cases that are judged to be "de minimis" can yet mount up and have a negative effect on conservation areas. One more serious case in our area concerns a Grade II listed building, which over decades has had its interior ripped out, and most recently a section of its pitched roof replaced with a roof terrace, all without any planning application, ever. An enforcement investigation on this and one of its three sister buildings is in progress.

By far our biggest project in the past few years has been, and will continue to be, the possible demolition and reconfiguration of the Holiday Inn Hotel in Cromwell Road. We are currently in talks with the new owners to have the demolition done by the eco-friendly internal deconstruction method, and to have the original Ashburn Garden Square restored as a beautiful public garden for all to enjoy. So far things are going well. Watch out for future updates.

Friederike Maeda

THE BOLTONS ASSOCIATION

In common with several other areas covered by The Kensington Society, the Boltons conservation area has seen an extraordinary amount of basement development in the past ten years or so. With RBKC's introduction of CL7 and the Article 4 Direction, our focus now is very much on Construction and Traffic Management Plans – seeking to ameliorate the disturbance to residents caused by basement 'digs'.

We get involved with the applicant/developers at an early stage as possible, to review their specific CTMP proposals and to



put these in the context of what has worked best for applicants/developers and their immediate neighbours/local residents regarding previous 'digs'. We have built up a body of past experience that can helpfully be brought to bear on current proposals. Generally, we have had a fair degree of success in persuading applicants/developers to make significant changes for the better to their draft CTMPs.

Routine amendments we suggest concern hours of delivery/collection to sites, plus routes of 'ingress' and 'egress'. More detailed interventions concern applicant/developers' proposed method of spoil removal. Depending on the location of the site concerned, plus the size and type of dig, we discuss 'grab and load', 'wait and load' and 'bag and load'. We have exchanged correspondence with Planning in this regard. Our general preference is for 'grab and load' - this avoids any over-pavement conveyor/gantry that is visible outside the hoarding at the front of the premises. This has resulted in there currently being no visible conveyors/gantries (or pedestrian walkways, for that matter) in the conservation area. Apart from the visual benefits to the street-scene, residents report that they are pleased not to have to use spooky pedestrian tunnels at night.

Calvin Jackson, Chairman

BROMPTON ASSOCIATION

Last year saw both good news and less good news emanating from the national museums. On a really positive note, the Natural History Museum's exciting scheme for transforming its grounds and providing new access into the museum to relieve crowding and queues gained full planning permission last summer. The association was delighted to lend its support, along with the Kensington Society, at the Planning Committee hearing. The scheme is designed by architect Niall McLaughlin and landscape designer Kim Wilkie. An application to the HLF has now been submitted which again the association has been pleased to support.

Less good over the past year has been the V&A's response to the concerns of local groups. First, ignoring comments, the V&A pressed ahead supporting a planning application to locate a large bridge structure directly in front of the main façade of the Museum. This was to mark the exhibition about the work of the engineer and founder of Arup Associates, Ove Arup. This vast structure would have obscured the Grade I façade of the museum for months and involved sinking foundations into the pavement and into the finely detailed entrance steps. Astonishingly, council officers favoured the proposal. Strong local objection, however, ensured that the application was turned down. Apart from blighting the setting of the V&A, the bridge structure was, in our view, little more than a clever advertising gimmick promoting the work of Arups, sponsors of the exhibition and applicants for the proposed bridge. The V&A suggested the bridge was somehow a work of art akin to the ceramic poppies in the moat at the Tower of London in 2014 – Bloodswept Lands and Seas of Red – commemorating the dead of World War 1.



More recently, as the Amanda Leveté Boiler House Square development nears completion, the V&A has been seeking licensing to allow a whole range of activities in the new space with long opening hours. Little thought is being given to the impact on local residents whose amenity will be directly affected and whose views the V&A seems content to ride roughshod over.



Arcade roof undergoing restoration

Discussions with Transport for London have continued throughout the year and a much more sympathetic scheme for the tube station seems now to be emerging. The proposed improvements to capacity within the station seem practical and the scale of likely development around the station is significantly reduced. Repair work to the station arcade has been progressing and TfL is to be applauded for putting clear glass back into the arcade roof and, having undertaken paint scrapes, to have returned the arcade to its original Edwardian colour scheme.

Sophie Andreae DSG, FSA, IHBC, Chairman

THE CAMPDEN HILL RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

The major issue this year has been the plans for the re-development of Newcombe House. Whilst CHRA agreed with much of the analysis produced by The Kensington Society, we felt unable to agree with the society's conclusion to support the Newcombe House re-development in its current form.

CHRA's prime concern is that there will be no on-site replacement for the 20 existing social-rented housing units above Kensington Place restaurant, which are managed by the Notting Hill Housing Trust. We made our concern known at the planning meeting on the 17 March 2016. Taking into account other objections raised by residents of Hillgate Village and various members of the Planning Committee the planning application was refused. The developer has appealed to the Planning Inspectorate and the appeal hearing starts on the 14th February 2017.

Frogmore has submitted plans for the refurbishment of three major blocks on Notting Hill Gate. The Kensington Society has been very active in raising various concerns, which we share. One major issue is the lack of financial contribution by Frogmore to improvements in the public realm.

Of real concern this year however has been the weather before and indeed after our summer party. Normally the St Georges Church hall provides a back up in the event of rain. However this year it was not available. So relying on divine intervention we were once again able to enjoy the delights



of Campden Hill Square garden notwithstanding rain before and rain after the event - what's more, although we didn't know it, even whilst we were enjoying the party it was teeming with rain on Bayswater Road.

David White, Chairman

CHERRY TREES RESIDENTS AMENITIES ASSOCIATION

2016 was dominated by things happening just outside the CTRAA area rather than within it.

The introduction of the council's stricter basement policies and the economic slowdown in Russia and the Far East, are probably the two main causes for why the number of new basement applications went down drastically in our area in 2016. But the number of already approved but not yet started basement projects means that we may still see several new basement builds in our area during 2017 – some of a size that would never be allowed today.

The demolishing of Lancer Square began in the autumn, but was surprisingly quiet. However, the digging of the double basement has now started and that may prove much noisier. The project is expected to be finished in 2019-2020.

Three major planning applications for Notting Hill Gate were determined by the council's planning committee in 2016.

The first one, for the Book Warehouse complex in the corner of Notting Hill Gate and Pembridge Gardens, was approved already in January 2016. The planned construction time is 16 months, but it is not yet clear when the work will start.

The second application, for the massive Newcombe House complex, offered many good things for the community, such as a large new GP surgery for 18,000 patients and a continuation of the farmers' market, but the height of the tallest building caused many locals to react, and



Lancer Square from above and from street



after an intensive internet campaign the planning committee decided to reject it in March 2016, although the planning department had advised for approval. The developer immediately appealed to the Planning Inspectorate and a public hearing by a planning inspector was eventually scheduled for 17 February 2017, so by the time you read this, the inspector may have decided. If the appeal is allowed, work will probably begin later this year. The project is estimated to take three years from start to finish.

The third application – split into three separate projects – involved recladding of five office buildings, with one or two additional floors on top that will pay for it. All three projects were approved on 8 November, and two of them are scheduled to begin early this year, with each taking 18-21 months. The third project, Astley House, won't start until 2019 and finish in 2021.

Thomas Blomberg

CLARENDON CROSS RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

CCRA has seen a continued steady stream of requests to comment on CTMPs for planned developments in our area over the past twelve months and these take some time to trawl through and respond to. However, there does seem to be some improvement in the quality of the drafts and more developers and their agents seem to be getting the message about how to avoid a number of re-writes eg. minimising resident parking bay suspensions by opting for wait and load methods of soil removal where possible over using skips sitting on the roadside.

As we are in a conservation area, we continue to encourage a reduction of signage on hoardings as this does get a bit out of hand with large signs being posted advertising the contractors and the fact they have signed up to the 'Considerate Contractors scheme'. Scaffolders erecting large projecting signs is another bugbear.

Socially, things have been quieter for CCRA in 2016 for a variety of reasons but partly because we have now lost (temporarily we hope) two of our community gathering points. Julie's Restaurant closed 2 years ago for a refurbishment but we hope to see its doors opening again at some point in 2017. The Academy pub on Princedale Road also closed its doors in the summer and is now up for sale. We hope that having been awarded 'Asset of Community Value' in 2014, we will see a new owner take it over soon and reopen it for the community to enjoy as a great local hub again. We are most grateful to the Kensington Society and Norland Conservation Society for their tireless efforts to help to make this happen.

We ended the year with another great Clarendon Cross Christmas Shopping Party with local shops and galleries staying open late, serving drinks and Christmas treats. There was a steel band, a



Christmas street party



complimentary BBQ by Lidgates Butchers and CCRA organised a raffle, with prizes kindly donated by the retailers, in support of local childrens' charity Solidarity Sports, raising £408. But the highlight for many were the reindeers which joined us again to add to the seasonal atmosphere.

Carolyn Arnold

EARLS COURT GARDENS & MORTON MEWS

Having lost our sorting office to the Earls Court Health and Wellbeing Centre a number of years ago, 2016 saw us lose the Earls Court Road Post Office, despite it never not having a queue. It has been replaced by a Paul patisserie, so it could have been worse.

There continues to be much building activity above and below ground. One unfortunate by-product of this is that the majority of our nice stone paving stones on the south side of Earls Court Gardens have been cracked and chipped by contractors' heavy lorries. The council seems reluctant to take action.

One site in Earls Court Gardens has been particularly contentious when the unveiling in the Spring of the contractor's total hoarding system, after over two years of basement and rear extension work, revealed a rear garden-facing flat roof constructed as a terrace, complete with a sheet glass balustrade. A condition of the 2009 planning permission specifically forbade the flat roof being used as terrace. To make matters worse, the Planning Department had told the applicant to remove the terrace from the original plans. This he did but the council wisely inserted a no terrace condition. In 2016 the applicant twice applied for retrospective permission for the terrace, latterly by inserting in plans side panels to the terrace to ameliorate overlooking the two adjacent properties. In the face of 19 objections, including one from the Kensington Society, the second application has been rejected too. Drone photography of the rear elevations and gardens was used to support the applicant's case but to no avail.

2016 saw our section of the Earls Court Road have a 20 mile an hour speed restriction but, despite having a ramp in the road opposite the underground station, traffic continues to speed and there is precious little time for pedestrians to cross the road at the pelican crossing opposite the station. The count-down starts at 4 seconds so it is only Usain Bolt-friendly.

Jonathan Green

THE EARL'S COURT SQUARE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

The association is delighted to announce the launch of its new website <http://www.ecsra.co.uk> which gives in-depth information on ECSRA and the local area. As this is a brand new website, it needs to be accessed initially via a browser rather than using a search engine such as Google. Although



available to all, there is a members only section with lots of additional information such as the monthly Earl's Court crime figures, rubbish and recycling reports, advance notice of ECSRA events and archives and photographs of the association. ECSRA was able to finance the new website due to a windfall win of £2,500 from the Golden Ticket Recycle Right prize draw for organisations and community groups as they pledged they would promote recycling within the association.

The main problem the RA has faced during 2016 was the increase in fly-tipping and short-term tenants dumping their rubbish on the pavements on the wrong day. Photographs are sent on a daily basis to RBKC/Streetline but it has proved difficult for enforcement action to be taken without ID in the rubbish bags. ECSRA is awaiting the installation of one of RBKC's mobile CCTV cameras to cover the worst hotspot in the square, which we hope will prove a deterrent.

During 2016 ECSRA held several events for the residents. The AGM followed by drinks and canapés, a tea party in the garden square (in association with the Garden Sub-Committee) to celebrate the Queen's 90th birthday, a BBQ/disco and a members only Spanish evening with our MP, Victoria Borwick, as our guest speaker. In December, all residents were invited to the annual lighting of the Christmas tree in the garden with carols, mulled wine, mince pies and hot chocolate.

Chrissie Courtney, chair



Garden party with our MP

EARLS COURT VILLAGE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION



Hollyhocks in Wallgrave Road, with a flower basket in the distance

The Party in the 'Patch'

In late June, with roses and wallflowers in full bloom in Providence Patch, a summer party was held to celebrate Her Majesty the Queen's 90th birthday.

Beneath patriotically-decorated marquees delicious food and wine were provided by committee members of the residents' association. The rich tones of Gordon Webber's Meantime Trio and guest singer Abi (generously provided by TLC), inspired some enthusiastic toe tapping and a few twirls, while children played



with their balloons and chased each other around the cherry tree in the centre of the lawn.

The chairman of the Earl's Court Village Flower Committee, presented a prize for the best party hat, followed by numerous attractive raffle prizes

Licensing – King's Head, 17 Hogarth Place

This has recently re-opened after a complete refurbishment following a successful application to the RBKC Licensing Sub-Committee to extend the licensed area to include the first floor as a restaurant. Owing to the very close proximity with our neighbouring residents, conditions were imposed on the premises licence with the agreement of the applicant, one of them being to provide a telephone number for the designated premises supervisor or the duty manager of the pub to enable any person who wishes, to make a complaint during the operation of the licence.

We are fortunate in having a harmonious relationship with the manager, Robb Graham.

However, there remains a planning issue with too strong advertising lighting, which shines into neighbours' windows.

Philippa Seebohm, chairman

FRIENDS OF HOLLAND PARK

2016 was a year when many long-planned initiatives either progressed significantly, or were completed.

Dialogue between the Friends, council and Opera Holland Park, resulted in public consultation on plans to improve the environment around Grade 1 listed Holland House. Comments were noted and refinements made to the proposals to resurface the south terrace, re-site the approach road and redesign the whole of the café terrace and café yard. Planning consent must be applied for, but current proposals represent considerable progress and the



Commonwealth Copse Holland Park

promise of an attractive space for park users to enjoy. Replacement of the seasonal opera marquees was not progressed as initial proposals were inappropriate, but the Friends still plan to work with Opera Holland Park to reduce build time and open the space around Holland House to the public for longer each year.

New directional signage in the park is both practical and attractive and a fee-based licensing scheme for trainers using the park is designed to prevent damage and to ensure seated areas remain peaceful places to enjoy.

After several years of discussion with the council, we are pleased that the borough's parks strategy and the Holland Park



Plan commit to creating a long-term tree programme that ensures we leave a beautiful treescape for future generations. The council has also committed to a proactive healthcare plan for existing trees in the park and the Friends have funded the first stage, now completed.

In line with our objective of educating the public about the park, we have produced two new guides: 'Decorative art in Holland Park' and 'Notable trees in Holland Park'.

The park still faces major challenges: significant cuts in the council parks' budget, temptation for the council to generate income from harmful commercialisation, climate change and damage from over-use by an ever increasing number of visitors.

Jennie Kettlewell, Chairman

KENSINGTON SQUARE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

The ceaseless struggle continues to protect our community from unsuitable or damaging projects by all those keen to exploit Kensington's mouth-watering rents and house prices - whether it's landlords, developers or absentee home-owners. One of the lesser known consequences of this gold-rush is how long such building or redevelopments take, with all the inconvenience it causes residents.

On average, we usually have to endure two years of builders' dust, noise and suspended parking bays, as new owners gut and remodel their property. But currently we have an example that easily beats that.



Kensington Court

In July 2013 a block of 10 flats in the centre of Kensington Court was bought by a company in the British Virgin Islands (where else?). By 2014 it was empty and ripe for refurbishing. Scaffolding was installed around the building and covered in plastic. And then for 18 months nothing happened – an eyesore in the heart of our community. Its plastic was often dislodged by the wind and flapped like thunderclaps, disturbing nearby residents. [pic: Kensington Court] Complaints to the council achieved little, as there was little it could do. You don't need planning permission to put up scaffolding, unless it's on public land. In the end, perhaps because of our pressure, this year the owners changed their project team and the scaffolding came down. But they tell us it will go up again next year to finish the job. By the time it's finished, the project will have taken nearly four years.

Meanwhile at the north end of Kensington Court, residents are wondering when work on the latest project in their terrace will begin. It's a five storey house, given permission (on appeal, as usual) to be gutted and restructured, way back in November 2014.

John Gau



THE KNIGHTSBRIDGE ASSOCIATION

Knightsbridge is fast becoming a building site.

Works to the underpass at Hyde Park Corner have thankfully been completed. However, the major redevelopment, behind the façade of 55–91 Knightsbridge; the impending works to The Berkeley; refurbishment at the Mandarin Oriental; K1, the Knightsbridge Estate's first phase of redevelopment, again mainly behind retained facades; redevelopment of the whole of the west side of Lancelot Place and four flats (pods built off site) to be craned on to the top of Park Mansions –all are contributing to traffic chaos. Combine this with works to install the Super Cycle Highway in Hyde Park and you have gridlock.



Traffic on Knightsbridge

With the new basement policies adopted by both RBKC and Westminster City Council there appears to have been a slight lull in applications.

Cadogan Estate/RBKC have been consulting on outline proposals for 'improvements' to the public realm in Sloane Street. Controversially they are suggesting reducing the highway to one traffic lane in each direction, which would enable them to widen the pavements. They were somewhat bemused by the outcry from residents' associations, many of whose members have spent many hours over the years sitting in Sloane Street's traffic jams. There will be a further consultation in the New Year.

In November English Heritage unveiled a plaque to Ava Gardner, who had lived for the last two decades of her life in Ennismore Gardens.

In addition we deal with regular consultations by RBKC and WCC, since our area spreads both sides of the border.

Carol Seymour-Newton

LADBROKE ASSOCIATION

In the Ladbroke area, 2016 saw a continued stream of planning applications for extensions – upwards, downwards, frontwards, backwards and sideways – as people sought to enlarge their properties rather than move. There have been fewer applications for basements, but they still came in at the rate of one or two a month. Roof extensions and rear extensions at lower ground floor level have proved particularly popular. The council has been good at resisting inappropriate roof extensions, but we have been concerned at some of the applications for rear extensions that have been granted on communal gardens, despite the clear emphasis in





The ginstitute



Hanging baskets in Ladbroke Grove

our Conservation Area Appraisal on the heritage significance of rear elevations backing onto communal gardens.

There have also been a number of applications for the amalgamation of flats to form large family houses and in one case consent was granted for three 1950s houses to be demolished and replaced by two larger family houses.

We have a number of historic pubs in the area, and the fate of two of them was a matter of concern during the year. We feared for the worst when the freeholder refused to renew the lease of the former Colville (First Floor Restaurant) on Portobello Road, but it has reopened, newly refurbished, as the Ginstitute, Portobello's own gin distillery. Unfortunately, the future of the Kensington Park Hotel on Ladbroke Grove remains uncertain, as the freeholder is seeking to sell the building – although the pub enjoys some protection as it has been designated an asset of community value.

Sophia Lambert, chairman

NEVERN SQUARE CONSERVATION AREA RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION



Constant tipping on street

As with many other Kensington squares, we have had an increase in the use of flats being used for AirBnB with consequent problems such as noise, and waste disposal on the pavements. There has been a growth in the number of companies both letting and servicing short term lets and in some cases properties have been bought, or on long-lease, and then used as a business rather than the maximum 90-days permitted. So news of the council's recent enforcement in St Ann's Road is particularly welcome.

Waste and waste disposal are perennial problems, and proving hard to solve. The association has objected to amalgamation of under-street vault areas into flats, which would reduce the amount of space available for waste, but in some cases, there are properties where no waste disposal storage areas are available.

Linda Wade

ONSLow NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSOCIATION

Nowadays the Onslow Neighbourhood Association finds that those issues that require most vigilance, are also being watched by the other associations and societies. This is a great relief to us as the more support we get, the more it helps persuade planning committees that we are no lone



voice crying in the wilderness, but part of a robust protest from representatives of a considerable section of local residents. Together, therefore, we have supported the Natural History Museum with its plans for improving the grounds, we have repulsed the Arup Bridge which would have disfigured the southern facade of the V & A for eight months. Together we have attended numerous meetings with Transport for London concerning the development of the South Kensington station making sure that we are not going to end up with huge development over the station. On our own we continue to attend the licensing and planning committees, trying to restrict the opening hours or noisy developments for the benefit of local residents, and doing whatever we can to prevent the continual drift of local retail shops into eating and drinking establishments.

Unfortunately, RBKC having decided in the Local Plan that South Kensington should become a 'cultural centre', we are now facing the consequences of this plan which has many negative aspects for the residents.

Richard Skinner

PEMBRIDGE

Our phoenix story of the year:

In the Kensington Society's 2012 annual report, the Pembridge Association announced celebration of its 40th year. This year the membership secretary, Jacqueline Pruskin wrote to us stating "concerns and worries that the Pembridge Association was losing members and that the committee members found themselves unable to act effectively after the loss in January 2015 of our Planning Officer, Roy Griffith, the illness of David Campion and the absence of a Secretary and Treasurer". Jacqueline asked for the Kensington Society's assistance with the accounts and Charity Commission annual submissions. The KS responded with a necessarily stern letter that managed to galvanise the last remaining committee members into action and the PA received additional help from Martin Frame to complete the preparation of the accounts for 2014 and 2015 and from Nick Ross with his advice to spend money on flyers to distribute throughout the Pembridge Area. The AGMs held in 2015 for 2014, and 2016 for 2015 had to be cancelled due to being inquorate but the 24 November 2016 AGM managed to attract a standing room only meeting and was fully quorate. It not only approved the accounts for 2014 and 2015 but managed in one hour (Nick Ross acting as chairman for the evening) to attract a sufficient number of new and older non-committee members to step up to committee-level commitment; and as of January 2017 this committee has formed, appointed a chair, secretary, treasurer and also a new planning officer. There are three new trustees, and two more in the pipeline. 'Most of the long-serving committee members have now either stepped down after very many years of donating their time and energies to serve the aims of the Pembridge Conservation Area, and/or plan to step down at the next AGM.



ST HELENS RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

2016 saw the completion of a neighbourhood plan for our part of North Kensington (the western part of the St Quintin Estate, north of the Westway). The plan was put together by our sister organisation, the St Quintin and Woodlands Neighbourhood Forum. The forum shares the same membership (now over 400 residents) as the association.

The final StQW Draft Plan was voted on at a local referendum in February 2016, and gained 92% support on a 23% turnout of registered electors. The council is now applying the policies in the neighbourhood plan when deciding planning applications. These new policies allow for a wider range of uses: neighbourhood shopping centres and in the Latimer Road part of the joint Freston/Latimer Employment Zone.

A much needed new cafe/bar opened in Latimer Road in January, as part of plans for a small local theatre and performance space in one of a row of 14 light industrial units. Bringing back some life to Latimer Road has been one of the main aims of the neighbourhood plan. The plan also protects from development three backland sites as Local Green Space.

While it has been a lot of effort, achieving a new set of neighbourhood level planning policies has been worthwhile. A legal challenge to the council's decision to advance the draft neighbourhood plan to its referendum has yet to be heard by the High Court. The claimants are the landowner and a housing developer, attempting to build housing on one of the three Local Green Spaces designated in the StQW Plan (the former nursery garden in Highlever Road).

Local residents have raised funds to participate in the legal case, and thanks to an £1,800 contribution from the Kensington Society the StQW Neighbourhood Forum has been able to engage a barrister so that we can participate as an interested party. The council is defending its decision that the StQW Plan meets all legal requirements, and we are optimistic on the outcome of a High Court decision.

In 2017, the association will be looking beyond planning issues, while still keeping a close eye on developments coming forward in the nearby Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation area. The impact of NHS re-organisations in north-west London is one local concern moving up the agenda. The effects on health of poor air quality is another.

Henry Peterson, chairman • sthelensassn@aol.com • www.sthelensresidents.org.uk
www.stqw.org

THURLOE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

TRA's remit is to raise awareness of topical issues, which affect the area and provide a democratic voice for local residents. Over the past five years, TRA has successfully fostered a friendlier, more engaged community, which has made the area a better place to live. That's the good news.

Despite the best efforts of local residents and the support of many resident and amenity associations, South Kensington continues to deteriorate under pressure from the impact of so many food establishments in the area. Combined with the soaring footfall,



there is a continual battle to keep the area clean and safe for all.

According to a recent Transport for London (TfL) Retail Survey undertaken in connection with the formation of development plans for the Underground station, A3 units (food and drink, restaurants and cafes) dominate the area. This has tipped the balance in favour of crowds, visitors and commercial interests and reduced the number of shops servicing the local community. It is also having the effect of hastening the demise of this once lovely historic neighbourhood.

Community groups have done a tremendous job of working with the local cultural institutions and TfL in ensuring its development plans are suitable and make a positive contribution to the neighbourhood.

It's not clear how TRA or any residents group can turn the tide in South Kensington. RBKC Planning certainly has not demonstrated a willingness to show leadership in organising the area. The local landlord, SKE, has a dubious reputation in such matters and perhaps not deep enough pockets to get the job done. What's the answer? Organisations like TRA will continue to chip away at the problem but should focus attention on galvanising all stakeholders into moving beyond individual self-interest to create a vision for South Kensington that meets the needs of all. It could be a vibrant, mixed-use area with real character but it needs a plan.

Jan Langmuir and Traci Weaver

VICTORIA ROAD AREA RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

There has been little progress on people moving into One Kensington Road. The search for a site for the public art associated with this scheme has stalled. Neighbouring residents opposed the Launceston Place island site and the northern end of Canning Passage had too many underground services. A German TV film included this scheme to find out why it was disliked by local people, when David Chipperfield has been successful with museum schemes in Germany.

The other notorious local saga which made the TV was the stripey house in South End. This appears to have come to a halt. The appeal result allowed a change of use to housing, although this has been challenged, but there is no consent for a basement let alone two and half! The owner lost all her cases against the council.

Albert Mews also rumbles on - a lot of work, but a proposed gate in the listed mews arch was withdrawn. Other long-running sagas include 4 Victoria Grove ("shopfront") and the revival of a scheme in Kensington Green that would affect Kelso Place.

Finally, there was "pigeongate" - enforcement action by the council to remove pigeon netting from the light well of a block of flats. The current state of play is that the council lost a judicial review case costing more than £30,000 - we hope that it will take a more sensible approach when the application is heard.



Stripey house

Michael Bach



STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2016

Income	2016	2015
Donations and legacies	£	£
Subscriptions	10,153.00	9,317.00
Donation and legacies	1,520.00	2,826.00
Gift Aid	2,343.70	2,715.82
Total donations and legacies	14,016.70	14,858.82
Charitable activities		
Events	7,545.00	4,132.29
Annual report advertising	7,365.00	5,770.00
Total charitable activities	14,910.00	9,902.29
Investment income		
Bank interest	396.34	247.64
Total income	29,323.04	25,008.75
Expenditure		
Charitable activities		
Newsletter	1,086.85	1,399.50
Events	3,974.33	3,142.52
Annual report	7,755.23	7,642.45
Charitable grants	1,800.00	4,845.96
Membership expenses	969.37	1,405.799
PayPal fees	120.15	53.96
Charitable subscriptions	115.00	80.00
Total charitable activities expense	15,820.93	18,570.18
Other		
Insurance	345.42	321.51
Professional fees	500.00	0.00
Total other expense	845.42	321.51
Total expenditure	16,666.35	18,891.69
Net income/(expenditure)	12,656.69	6,117.06
Total unrestricted funds brought forward	77,012.19	70,895.13
Total unrestricted funds carried forward	89,668.88	77,012.19

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2016

	2015 £	2014 £
Current assets		
Debtors		
Accrued income and prepayments		
Interest	29.07	62.42
Gift aid	0.00	0.00
Insurance	226.43	223.99
Total accrued income and prepayments	255.50	286.41
Cash at bank and in hand		
Nationwide Building Society	75,000.00	62,000.00
Barclays Bank	13,788.47	15,180.91
PayPal	1,124.91	290.06
Total cash at bank and in hand	89,913.38	77,470.97
Total current assets	90,168.88	77,757.38
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year		
Deferred income		
Events	0.00	60.00
Accruals		
Professional fees	500.00	0.00
Event expenses	0.00	685.19
Total deferred income and accruals	500.00	745.19
Net assets	89,668.88	77,012.19
Funds of the charity		
Unrestricted funds	89,668.88	70,895.13

Approved by the Trustees on 16 February 2017.

Martin Frame

Treasurer, The Kensington Society, 23 St James's Gardens, London W11 4R

FINANCIAL REVIEW

The net income for the year was £12,656.69, which was an increase of £6,539.63 from last year. Subscriptions were £10,153, an increase of £836.00. Donations and legacies of £1,520.00 decreased by £1,306.00 as there were no legacies. Gift aid received was £2,343.70. The annual report expense (net of advertising income) was £390.23. Charitable grants were for legal advice on planning issues and amounted to £1,800.00. The balance sheet remains strong with unrestricted funds of the society of £89,668.88. £75,000.00 is on deposit with the Nationwide Building Society. These funds provide a strong financial base and are necessary for the secure future of the society and its charitable activities. The Society wishes to thank all the members who have generously subscribed, donated and participated in the events during the year.

NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS For the year ended 31 December 2016

- **Charity registered address and number**
The Kensington Society's registered address is 23 St James's Gardens London W11 4RE and its registered charity number is 267778.
- **Accounting policies**
These accounts have been prepared based under the historical cost convention in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities – Statement of Recommended Practice (FRS 102).

Income

- **Recognition of incoming income**
These are included in the Statement of Financial Activities (SoFA) when:
 - The charity becomes entitled to the income;
 - The trustees are virtually certain they will receive the income; and
 - The monetary value can be measured with sufficient reliability.
- **Donations**
Donations are only included in the SoFA when the charity has unconditional entitlement to the income.
- **Tax reclaims on gifts and donations**
Incoming income from tax reclaims are included in the SoFA to the extent that claims have been made.
- **Volunteer help**
The value of any voluntary help received is not included in the financial activities.
- **Investment income**
This is included in the financial activities when receivable.

Expenditure and liabilities

- **Liability recognition**
Liabilities are recognised as soon as there is a legal or constructive obligation committing the charity to expenditure.

Financial instruments

- **Debtors**
Debtors do not carry any interest and are stated at their nominal value. Appropriate allowances for estimated irrecoverable amounts are recognised in the SoFA when there is objective evidence that the asset is impaired.
- **Cash at bank and in hand**
These comprise cash at bank and other short-term highly liquid bank deposits with an original maturity of three months or less.

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